Winter 12-12-2017

Qualitative Exploration of Principal Behaviors in Elementary Schools Classified with High Climate and High Achievement

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QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF PRINCIPAL BEHAVIORS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS CLASSIFIED WITH HIGH CLIMATE AND HIGH STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
In
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
Presented to
the Faculty of the Bagwell College of Education
Kennesaw State University

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by
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October, 2017
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In reflecting on my time as a graduate student at Kennesaw State University, I am beyond thankful for the opportunities I have been given to work with amazingly talented, intelligent, and supportive faculty members. Thank you to each and every professor who took time to guide, nurture, and help me grow as an educational leader. I am far better of a leader than I was before I walked through the admissions office of Kennesaw State University. To all of my cohort members who have collaborated, shared, and lived this experience with me: I thank you all for the friendship, support, encouragement, and honesty you have offered throughout this entire process. Thank you to the principals who were willing to take part in this study and dedicated their time and talents. Their wisdom, experience, and willingness to collaborate with me on this study allowed me the opportunity to increase my abilities as a researcher and a professional educational leader. The state of public education is in good hands with leaders like these at the helm.

I am beyond grateful to my committee members for the continued love, rich feedback, and candid honesty in areas for improvement throughout my doctoral journey. You have shaped my research and improved my learning continually throughout this process. Thank you all for believing in me and supporting me every step of the way: Dr. Sheryl Croft, for stepping up and stepping in as my committee chair and showing both compassion and frankness when needed; Dr. Albert Jimenez, for guiding my research and being honest in the changes that needed to be made in my methodology to improve this study, and for his gentle firmness in letting me know that this is not an easy task and that I should be proud of my accomplishments; Dr. Susan Padgett-Harrison, for constantly expecting more of me—she has the unique ability to make you want to do better through her direct, but very loving manner; Dr. Georgann Toop, for always being there to offer guidance and support, for the many answered phone calls, e-mails, and

meetings to ensure I was on the right track, and most importantly, for her genuine friendship and love!

To my former chair, Dr. Mary Chandler—while she may be gone, she will never be forgotten. She saw something in me that I did not even see myself. She was instrumental in my pursuing this degree from the beginning of my specialist degree. Dr. Chandler was often my champion and had enough brass to make me truly reflect on a life-changing question: "Who cares?" Because of this question, I reflected and continue to reflect on what is important in education, and in life, as a whole.

To Kennesaw State University as a whole—thank you for providing me with an opportunity to attain a doctorate degree in "my own backyard." This institution has made me very proud to be an "Owl." As I prepare to receive my third degree from this university, I have watched unprecedented growth and am continually amazed that they have never lost sight of what matters most: the students. I thank you all for this opportunity.

DEDICATION

I want to thank God for giving me the strength, ability, and perseverance to complete this project! This work is dedicated to my ever-faithful wife, Anne. Because of her love and support, I have been able to accomplish things that I never thought were possible. When I reached burnout, she would remind me how far I have come and how close I am finishing. These gentle words of support often gave me the motivation I needed to continue my efforts to complete this dissertation. She is my rock, my confidant, and my best friend! Simply put, Anne makes me want to strive to be a better man. Thank you for *always* believing in me and letting me know that you are right beside me to help me through whatever life throws our way. You are truly the best wife, mother, and friend I could have ever hoped to have!

I would be remiss if I did not thank my children for believing in me and always offering support and understanding when I was tied to my computer and they had to wait to have my time or attention. My future lies in their hopes and dreams and I pray that my efforts during this journey of pursuing a doctoral degree prove that *anything* is attainable if you want it bad enough. My children are the most beautiful and talented people I have ever met, and my greatest hopes are that they can one day see themselves through my eyes. My family is the reason I have taken this journey and I have been immeasurably blessed by their love, patience, and support!

To my mother for always, no matter what, believing in me and making me feel that I can accomplish anything. I am eternally grateful for her unwavering love and support! She continues, as she has throughout my life, to help me feel like I can do the impossible.

Finally, this work is dedicated to anyone who has ever felt like an underdog, or has been made to feel lesser at any point in his or her life. Here is proof that you can accomplish anything when *you* believe in yourself!

ABSTRACT

Qualitative Exploration of Principal Behaviors
in Elementary Schools Classified
with High Climate and High Student Achievement

The purpose of this study is to gain a clear understanding of principal behaviors in high achieving/high climate elementary schools in North Georgia and the impact of these behaviors on future principal professional learning practices. This research study was conducted using a qualitative case study with a phenomenological approach. The particular phenomena studied in this research are the characteristics and behaviors exhibited by principals in elementary schools with high achievement and high climate ratings in one North Georgia School District. Case studies, by nature, involve a small target population.

The study analyzed total instructional programs, reducing the achievement gap, and developing a positive school climate with a high level of student, teacher, and community engagement. This study includes details on practices that enhance curriculum instruction and increase school climate and culture. The participants consisted of eight elementary school principals from high achieving/high climate schools from one North Georgia School District.

The findings were presented categorized by the three themes that emerged during the interviews—data, communication, and relationships. Each of the findings enforces the importance of the principal in developing high achievement and high climate and culture within the school. The respondents in this study claimed that principals assume the responsibility of developing high achieving/high climate schools. Colleges and universities should be purposeful in their preparation of principals to include courses on effectively disaggregating and utilizing data as well as interpersonal relationships skills that make effective school leaders. Finally, the state and local districts should provide guidance and training about how to effectively utilize data to drive instruction as well as ways to increase the emotional quotient of principals.

This research provides insight with regard to the role of the principal and ways to enhance

data uses and interpersonal relationship skills. The findings impact how colleges and universities could structure their preparation programs for school leaders. Furthermore, individual principals will find this research valuable due to the pragmatic findings in the study. Principals can find critical information about how roles and responsibilities can impact overall school achievement as well as school climate and culture. Districts can use this research to assess their training of principals for leadership preparation in an effort to further enhance district wide achievement and climate ratings.

Keywords: accessibility, communication, data, Formative Instructional Practices, high achievement school, high climate school, leadership, professional learning, rapport, relationships, Response to Intervention, school climate, school culture, student achievement, and visibility.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

When discussing educational leadership, it is easy to get confused as to what leadership in education truly means. Leadership styles in education vary; hence, pinpointing which leadership styles are most effective in regards to school climate and student achievement can become quite a challenge. For example, there is instructional leadership, servant leadership, constructivist leadership, cultural leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, and primal leadership (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Regardless of the style to which a school leader adheres, the overall outcome sought by school leaders is primarily the same—improvement in student achievement and school climate (Bouchamma, 2012; Harris, Spina, Ehrich, & Smeed, 2013). Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) stated, "Leadership is all about organizational improvement; more specifically, it is all about establishing widely agreed upon and worthwhile directions for the organization and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions" (p. 11). Through numerous studies regarding the importance of leadership in education (Dimmock, 2011; Goldring & Greenfield, 2005; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Southworth, 2002), research has shown that leadership has a significant effect on the school organization as a whole as well as student achievement. While there are other factors that help determine student success, leadership is one of the most vital components (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; National Association of Elementary Principals, 2013). Furthermore, schools that are struggling must have a competent leader to evolve in to becoming a successful school (Parsons & Beauchamp, 2012). Leithwood et al. (2004) exclaimed, "Many other factors may contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst" (p. 7).

The purpose of this study is to gain a clear understanding of principal behaviors in high achieving/high climate elementary schools in North Georgia and the impact of these behaviors on future principal professional learning practices. Various studies (Loukas & Robinson, 2004; Kober, 2001; Norton, 2008) suggest that school climate plays a large role in determining student achievement. Thus, it is extremely important for a school leader to understand the factors that contribute to a school's climate. However, it is not enough to merely understand what these factors are; an effective leader must cultivate these areas and refine them to be positively impactful for the students, faculty, and community at large (Hewitt, Davis, & Lashley, 2014; Sields, 2010).

To develop a positive school climate, principals often employ the leadership style of transformational leadership as a resource for change (Shields, 2010). Transformational leadership emphasizes intrinsic motivation and positive development of followers while challenging and empowering the followers, consequently creating followers who are loyal, high performers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The theory of transformational leadership has become an increasingly popular approach for a great deal of research and application (Dinh et al., 2014; Burke, 2014; Day, Fleeror, Atwater, Strum, & McKee, 2014); transformational leadership inspires, energizes, and intellectually stimulates followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership was initially introduced by Burns (1978) and was described as a leadership style aimed at uplifting the morale, motivation, and morals of the followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Piccolo and Colquitt (2006) explained that since first introduced, transformational leadership has evolved into four dimensions of leader behavior. These dimensions are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006).

Idealized influence is the leader's use of charisma, which causes the followers to identify

with them (Boerner, Eisenbeiss, & Griesser, 2007). Inspirational motivation can be described as the level that leaders communicate visions that are appealing to the followers (Wang & Howell, 2010). Intellectual stimulation is the level that leaders take risks, challenge assumptions, and ask for followers' ideas (Moynihan, Padney, & Wright, 2011). Individualized consideration is the level that leaders hear the concerns of the followers, mentor and guide their followers, and work to meet the needs of their followers (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). Since transformational leaders are typically charismatic and appeal to various aspects desired by their followers, transformational leaders often have the ability to impact the climate of the school (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

The role of the principal has shifted from that of being a manager who focuses on discipline and record keeping to that of an instructional leader with vision for change and improvement (Janc & Appelbaum, 2004; Crow, Matthews, & McCleary, 2013). Pingle and Cox (2006) proclaimed that the job of a principal has become excessively challenging with continually increasing demands, noting that:

> Principals today must serve as leaders for student learning. They must know and understand academic content and pedagogical techniques. They must be able to work with teachers to strengthen their instructional skills. They must collect, analyze and use data to improve test scores. They must seek to rally students, teachers, parents, local health and family service agencies, youth development groups, local businesses and other community members around the common goal of improving student performance. They must also develop the leadership skills and knowledge necessary to effectively exercise autonomy and pursue successful academic strategies. (p. 2)

To be an effective instructional leader, a principal must be able to interpret standardized test scores, discipline records, attendance records, climate surveys, and other various forms of data with the intention of utilizing the data to drive decisions that affect school climate (Stiggins & Duke, 2008; Horng & Loeb, 2010; Grisson, Loeb, & Master, 2013). Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) explained that improved student achievement, quality instruction, and school climate are often associated with effective leadership. Fullan (2002) explained that leading and managing effective schools to respond to the more challenging demands of society would require the knowledge and technical skills of dedicated and competent leaders, with a continued focus on the development of teachers' knowledge and skills, professional community, program coherence, and technical resources.

The importance that a principal has on the climate of the school as well as student achievement is monumental. Leithwood et al. (2004) stated, "Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p.7). Because of the importance of the role that the principal plays within a school, this study will examine the data to determine if there are distinct behaviors of principals in high achieving schools that also have a high climate rating. Additionally, this study will explore if practices and behaviors of principals in high achieving/high climate schools can inform professional learning for other principals to increase positive school climate and culture as well as student academic performance.

Research Questions

1. Are there discernable behaviors that leaders have in common for schools with high achievement and high climate and culture ratings?
2. Can principal practices and behaviors of high achieving/high climate schools be informative to the field of principal professional development to enhance positive school

climate and culture and student academic performance?

Significance of the Study

With the increased focus on the school climate and the role that the climate plays in student achievement, it is imperative that principals be well versed in methods that help enhance a positive school climate. Currently, there is no district wide professional learning for elementary principals that is consistent and pervasive across the school district being studied. By determining whether there are common characteristics and behaviors of successful principals within this district, the goal of this researcher is to contribute to improving the professional learning of principals across the district. While there continues to be a growing demand of high quality principals, it is imperative that we gain greater knowledge about how we develop principals (Barnes, 2015). By creating professional learning informed by this research, the school district will increase the opportunity for improvements to school climate and student achievement, leading to more schools potentially increasing student achievement scores as well as climate ratings across the district.

Review of Relevant Terms

In this body of research, various researchers use some terms differently. Therefore, it is essential to clarify key terms significant to this research: *accessibility, College and Career Readiness Performance Index* (and all components), *communication, data, school climate, school culture, high achievement school, high climate school, leadership, rapport, relationships, student achievement, visibility,* and *professional learning.*

Accessibility: "Capable of being reached; easy to speak to or deal with; capable of being used or seen; capable of being understood or appreciated; capable of being influenced" (Merriam-Webster, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/accessible).

Communication: "A process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior" (Merriam-Webster, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication).

Data: Facts and statistics collected together for reference and analysis; "information . . . that includes both useful and irrelevant information and must be processed to be meaningful" (Merriam-Webster, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/data).

School climate: In the literature, there are many variations of the definition for *school climate*. For the purpose of this study, the National School Climate Center's (2014) definition is most applicable. The National School Climate Center defined *school climate* as "The quality and character of school life that is based on the patterns of students', parents', and school personnel's experiences of school life."

High achievement school: Schools whose overall College and Career Readiness Performance Index score is above 90 (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).

High climate school: A school who has received a 4- or 5-star rating on their College and Career Readiness Performance Index (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

Leadership: This is the process whereby an individual may influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007).

Professional learning: Professional learning is the ongoing learning process in which additional resources are provided to educators in order for them to achieve high expectations within the academic environment. Professional learning keeps educators well informed of best practices for educating today's youth. Professional learning is essential for sustained growth of educators (Kostadinovic, 2011).

Rapport: "A friendly, harmonious relationship; a relationship characterized by agreement, mutual understanding, or empathy that makes communication possible or easy" (Merriam-Webster, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rapport).

Relationships: "The way in which two or more people, groups, countries, etc., talk to, behave toward, and deal with each other" (Merriam-Webster, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/relationships).

School culture: School culture often has different meaning to different people. However, "The beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions," as defined in the Glossary of Education Reform (2014), is the most concise explanation as it pertains to this study.

Student achievement: In the present study, *student achievement* refers to the scores that students in grades 3–5 achieved on the Georgia Milestones Assessment (Georgia Milestones Assessment System, 2016).

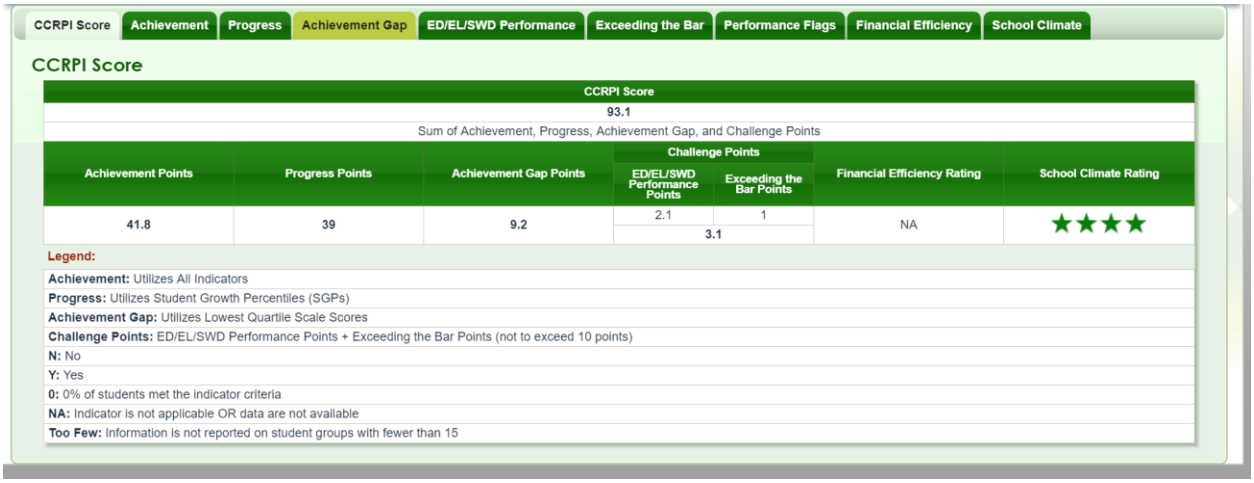
Visibility: "The ability to see or be seen; the quality or state of being known to the public" (http://www.learnersdictionary.com/definition/visibility).

In addition to the key terms listed above, information pertaining to the sections of the College and Career Readiness Performance Index is included below. The CCRPI is broken into multiple sections that include CCRPI score, achievement, progress, achievement gap, economically disadvantaged (ED)/English learners (EL)/and students with disabilities (SWD), exceeding the bar, performance flags, and school climate. Furthermore, the researcher has included information regarding the surveys that are utilized to help determine a school's climate star rating.

College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI): A platform for school improvement, accountability, and communication for educational stakeholders that promotes college and career readiness for public school students in Georgia (Georgia DOE, n.d.).

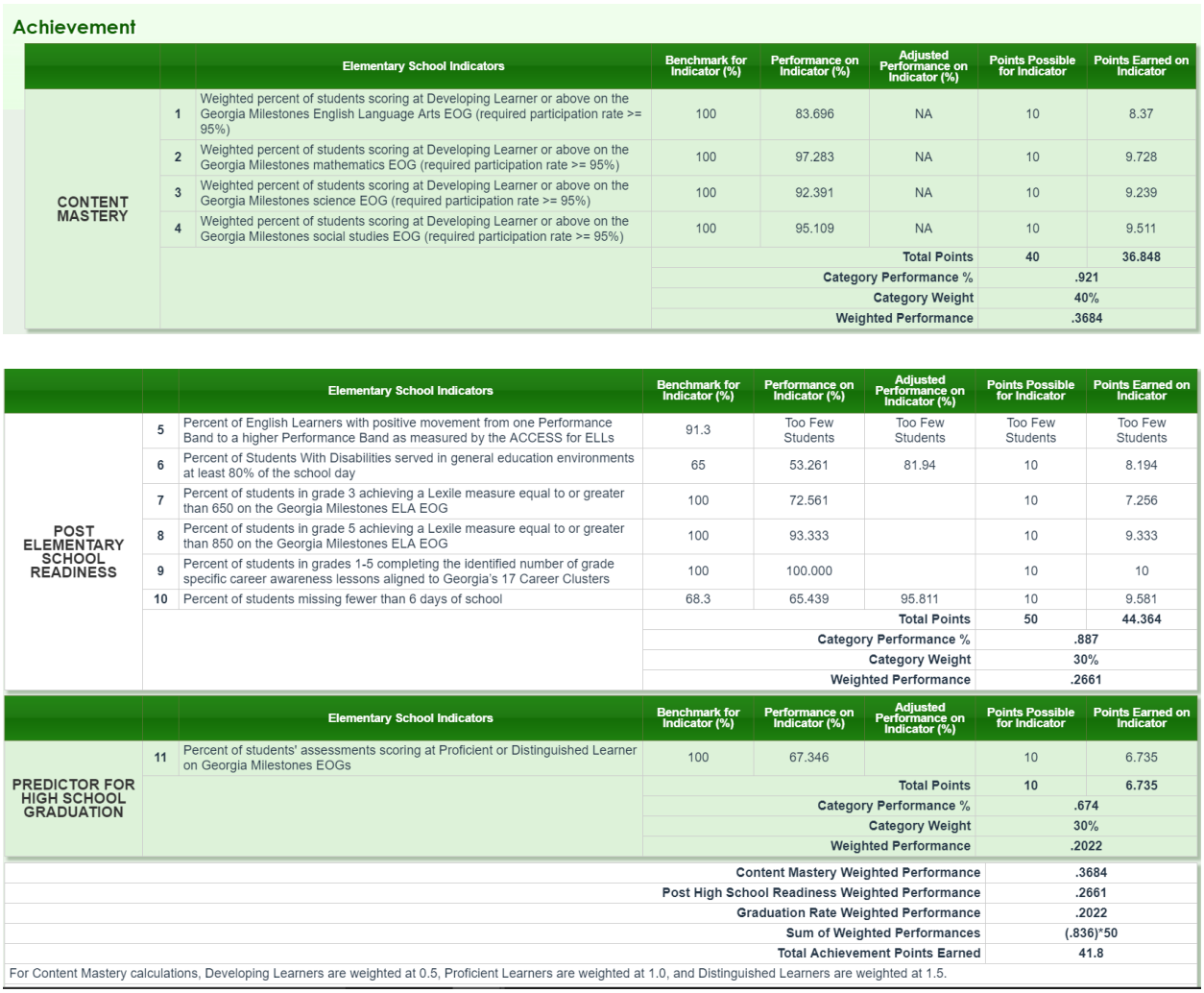
CCRPI Score: A section of the CCRPI that is a general overview of all sections of a school's CCRPI score (see figure 1) (Georgia DOE, n.d.).

Figure 1. *Sample CCRPI Score*



Achievement: A section of the CCRPI that is made up of three subsections: "Content Mastery," "Post Elementary School Readiness," and "Predictor for High School Graduation" (Georgia DOE, n.d.). Indicators for each of these subsections can be seen in figure 2.

Figure 2. *Sample of "Achievement" Section of CCRPI*



Achievement

		Elementary School Indicators	Benchmark for Indicator (%)	Performance on Indicator (%)	Adjusted Performance on Indicator (%)	Points Possible for Indicator	Points Earned on Indicator
CONTENT MASTERY	1	Weighted percent of students scoring at Developing Learner or above on the Georgia Milestones English Language Arts EOG (required participation rate >= 95%)	100	83.696	NA	10	8.37
	2	Weighted percent of students scoring at Developing Learner or above on the Georgia Milestones mathematics EOG (required participation rate >= 95%)	100	97.283	NA	10	9.728
	3	Weighted percent of students scoring at Developing Learner or above on the Georgia Milestones science EOG (required participation rate >= 95%)	100	92.391	NA	10	9.239
	4	Weighted percent of students scoring at Developing Learner or above on the Georgia Milestones social studies EOG (required participation rate >= 95%)	100	95.109	NA	10	9.511
					Total Points	40	36.848
					Category Performance %	.921	
					Category Weight	40%	
					Weighted Performance	.3684	

		Elementary School Indicators	Benchmark for Indicator (%)	Performance on Indicator (%)	Adjusted Performance on Indicator (%)	Points Possible for Indicator	Points Earned on Indicator
POST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL READINESS	5	Percent of English Learners with positive movement from one Performance Band to a higher Performance Band as measured by the ACCESS for ELLs	91.3	Too Few Students	Too Few Students	Too Few Students	Too Few Students
	6	Percent of Students With Disabilities served in general education environments at least 80% of the school day	65	53.261	81.94	10	8.194
	7	Percent of students in grade 3 achieving a Lexile measure equal to or greater than 650 on the Georgia Milestones ELA EOG	100	72.561		10	7.256
	8	Percent of students in grade 5 achieving a Lexile measure equal to or greater than 850 on the Georgia Milestones ELA EOG	100	93.333		10	9.333
	9	Percent of students in grades 1-5 completing the identified number of grade specific career awareness lessons aligned to Georgia's 17 Career Clusters	100	100.000		10	10
	10	Percent of students missing fewer than 6 days of school	68.3	65.439	95.811	10	9.581
					Total Points	50	44.364
					Category Performance %	.887	
					Category Weight	30%	
					Weighted Performance	.2661	

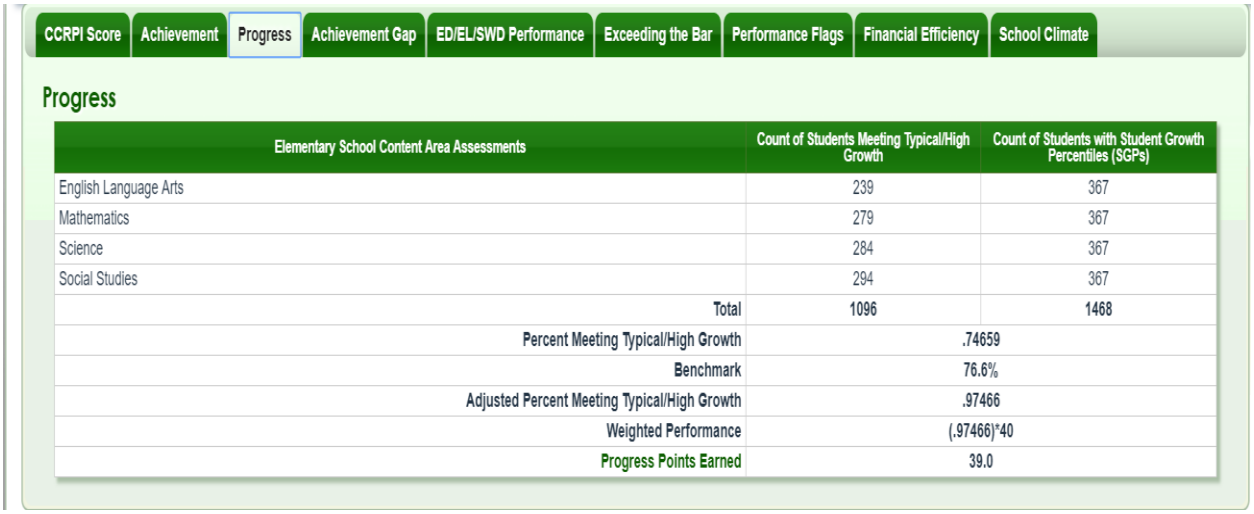
		Elementary School Indicators	Benchmark for Indicator (%)	Performance on Indicator (%)	Adjusted Performance on Indicator (%)	Points Possible for Indicator	Points Earned on Indicator
PREDICTOR FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION	11	Percent of students' assessments scoring at Proficient or Distinguished Learner on Georgia Milestones EOGs	100	67.346		10	6.735
					Total Points	10	6.735
					Category Performance %	.674	
					Category Weight	30%	
					Weighted Performance	.2022	

Content Mastery Weighted Performance	.3684
Post High School Readiness Weighted Performance	.2661
Graduation Rate Weighted Performance	.2022
Sum of Weighted Performances	(.836)*50
Total Achievement Points Earned	41.8

For Content Mastery calculations, Developing Learners are weighted at 0.5, Proficient Learners are weighted at 1.0, and Distinguished Learners are weighted at 1.5.

Progress: Measures the content area assessments for English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. The count of students meeting typical/high growth for each area is compared to the count of students with student growth percentiles (SGPs) (Georgia DOE, n.d.). Figure 3 is a sample of the "Progress" section of the CCRPI.

Figure 3. *Sample of "Progress" Section of CCRPI*



CCRPI Score | Achievement | Progress | Achievement Gap | ED/EL/SWD Performance | Exceeding the Bar | Performance Flags | Financial Efficiency | School Climate

Progress

Elementary School Content Area Assessments	Count of Students Meeting Typical/High Growth	Count of Students with Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)
English Language Arts	239	367
Mathematics	279	367
Science	284	367
Social Studies	294	367
Total	1096	1468
Percent Meeting Typical/High Growth	.74659	
Benchmark	76.6%	
Adjusted Percent Meeting Typical/High Growth	.97466	
Weighted Performance	(.97466)*40	
Progress Points Earned	39.0	

Achievement Gap: Gap progress is determined by the current year's growth of the lowest 25% of students in the school based on their prior scores (Georgia DOE, n.d.). Figure 4 is a sample of the "Achievement Gap" section of CCRPI.

Figure 4. *Sample of "Achievement Gap" Section of CCRPI*

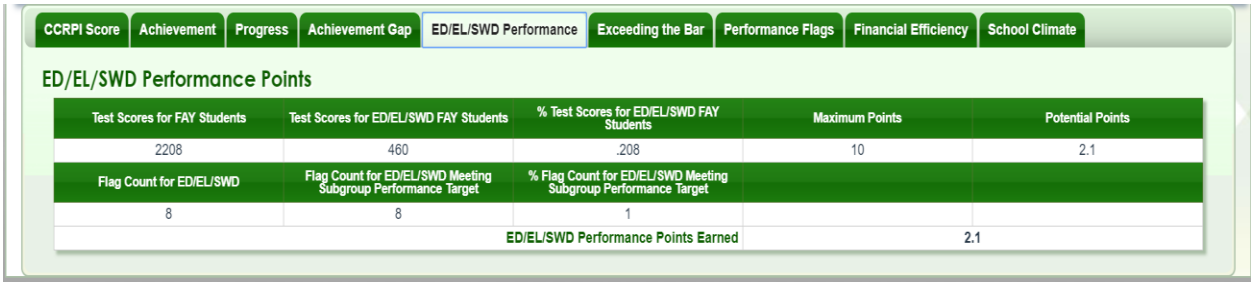
CCRPI Score | Achievement | Progress | Achievement Gap | ED/EL/SWD Performance | Exceeding the Bar | Performance Flags | Financial Efficiency | School Climate

Achievement Gap

Elementary School Content Area Assessments	Gap Size	Gap Progress	Higher of Gap Size/Gap Progress	Points Possible
EOG: English Language Arts	3	2	3	3
EOG: Mathematics	3	2	3	3
EOG: Science	2	2	2	3
EOG: Social Studies	3	3	3	3
Total			11	12
Percent of Higher of Gap Size/Gap Progress	.91667			
Weighted Performance	(.91667)*10			
Achievement Gap Points Earned	9.2			

ED/EL/SWD Performance: The Economically Disadvantaged (ED)/English Learners (EL)/Students with Disabilities (SWD) section determines if subgroups are meeting achievement performance goals (Georgia DOE, n.d.). Figure 5 illustrates the "ED/EL/SWD" section of the CCRPI.

Figure 5. *Sample of "ED/EL/SWD" Section of CCRPI*



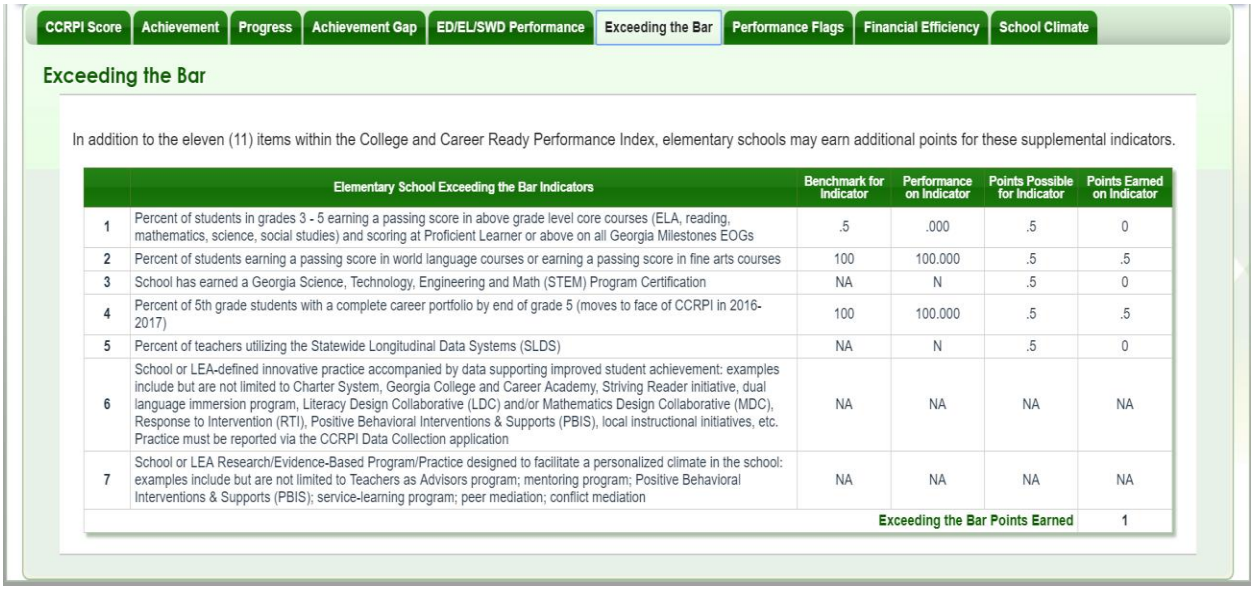
CCRPI Score | Achievement | Progress | Achievement Gap | ED/EL/SWD Performance | Exceeding the Bar | Performance Flags | Financial Efficiency | School Climate

ED/EL/SWD Performance Points

Test Scores for FAY Students	Test Scores for ED/EL/SWD FAY Students	% Test Scores for ED/EL/SWD FAY Students	Maximum Points	Potential Points
2208	460	.208	10	2.1
Flag Count for ED/EL/SWD	**Flag Count for ED/EL/SWD Meeting Subgroup Performance Target**	**% Flag Count for ED/EL/SWD Meeting Subgroup Performance Target**		
8	8	1		
		ED/EL/SWD Performance Points Earned	**2.1**	

Exceeding the Bar: Verifies that schools are implementing practices that improve student achievement in preparation for college and careers (Georgia DOE, n.d.). Figure 6 depicts the areas that a school can earn Exceeding the Bar points within the CCRPI.

Figure 6. *Sample of "Exceeding the Bar" Section of CCRPI*



CCRPI Score | Achievement | Progress | Achievement Gap | ED/EL/SWD Performance | Exceeding the Bar | Performance Flags | Financial Efficiency | School Climate

Exceeding the Bar

In addition to the eleven (11) items within the College and Career Ready Performance Index, elementary schools may earn additional points for these supplemental indicators.

	Elementary School Exceeding the Bar Indicators	Benchmark for Indicator	Performance on Indicator	Points Possible for Indicator	Points Earned on Indicator
1	Percent of students in grades 3 - 5 earning a passing score in above grade level core courses (ELA, reading, mathematics, science, social studies) and scoring at Proficient Learner or above on all Georgia Milestones EOGs	.5	.000	.5	0
2	Percent of students earning a passing score in world language courses or earning a passing score in fine arts courses	100	100.000	.5	.5
3	School has earned a Georgia Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Program Certification	NA	N	.5	0
4	Percent of 5th grade students with a complete career portfolio by end of grade 5 (moves to face of CCRPI in 2016-2017)	100	100.000	.5	.5
5	Percent of teachers utilizing the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS)	NA	N	.5	0
6	School or LEA-defined innovative practice accompanied by data supporting improved student achievement: examples include but are not limited to Charter System, Georgia College and Career Academy, Striving Reader initiative, dual language immersion program, Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and/or Mathematics Design Collaborative (MDC), Response to Intervention (RTI), Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS), local instructional initiatives, etc. Practice must be reported via the CCRPI Data Collection application	NA	NA	NA	NA
7	School or LEA Research/Evidence-Based Program/Practice designed to facilitate a personalized climate in the school: examples include but are not limited to Teachers as Advisors program; mentoring program; Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS); service-learning program; peer mediation; conflict mediation	NA	NA	NA	NA
				Exceeding the Bar Points Earned	**1**

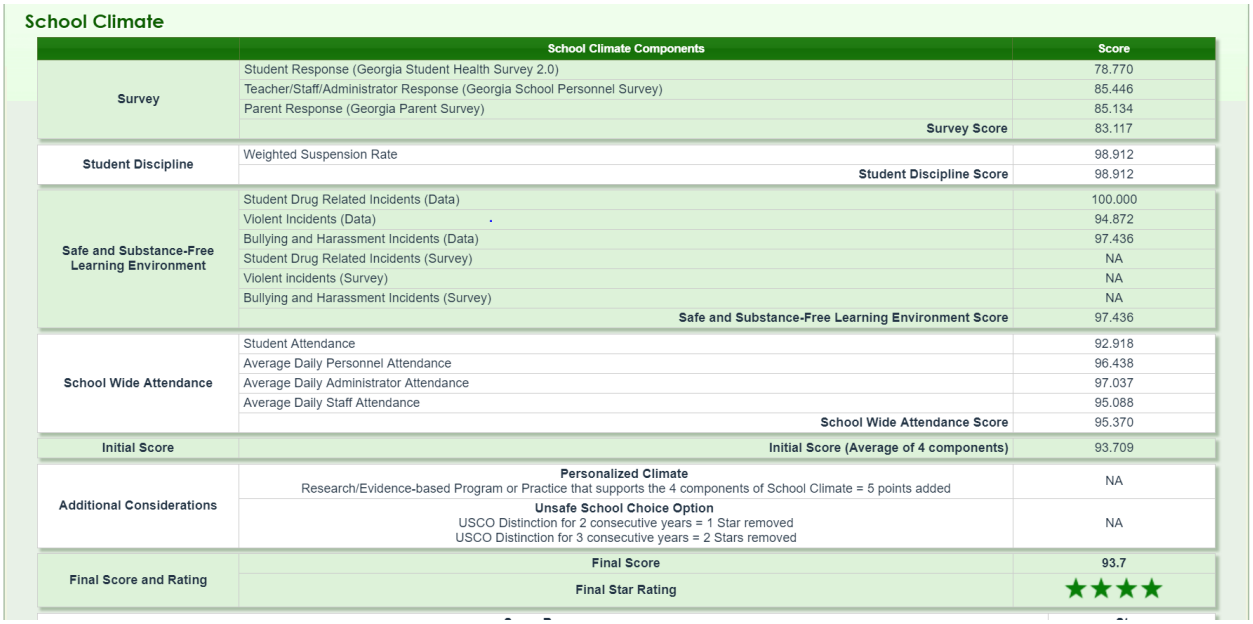
Performance: While the "Performance" section of the CCRPI does not calculate points toward the CCRPI Score, this section offers rich data for teachers and administrators. This section indicates how each subgroup within a school is performing through an easy-to-read chart that flags subgroup performance. Each of the subgroups (American Indian/Alaskan, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, Multi-Racial, White, Economically Disadvantaged, English Learners, and Students with Disabilities) are given performance flags for the four academic areas

(English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) based upon how well the subgroup performed within the specific academic area. This "at-a-glance" chart allows educators to quickly recognize which subgroups are meeting or are not meeting their performance goals. Figure 7 is a sample of the "Performance" section of the CCRPI (Georgia DOE, n.d.).

Figure 7. *Sample of "Performance" Section of CCRPI*

School Climate: The "School Climate" section of the CCRPI is utilized to develop the school's overall Climate Star Rating. This section is comprised of four subsections: "Survey," "Student Discipline," "Safe and Substance-Free Learning Environment," and "School Wide Attendance" (Georgia DOE, n.d.). Figure 8 illustrates the areas to which school climate points are awarded as well as a legend for the Climate Star Rating scale.

Figure 8. *Sample of "School Climate" Section of CCRPI with Climate Star Rating Legend*



School Climate

	School Climate Components	Score
Survey	Student Response (Georgia Student Health Survey 2.0)	78.770
	Teacher/Staff/Administrator Response (Georgia School Personnel Survey)	85.446
	Parent Response (Georgia Parent Survey)	85.134
	Survey Score	83.117
Student Discipline	Weighted Suspension Rate	98.912
	Student Discipline Score	98.912
Safe and Substance-Free Learning Environment	Student Drug Related Incidents (Data)	100.000
	Violent Incidents (Data)	94.872
	Bullying and Harassment Incidents (Data)	97.436
	Student Drug Related Incidents (Survey)	NA
	Violent incidents (Survey)	NA
	Bullying and Harassment Incidents (Survey)	NA
	Safe and Substance-Free Learning Environment Score	97.436
School Wide Attendance	Student Attendance	92.918
	Average Daily Personnel Attendance	96.438
	Average Daily Administrator Attendance	97.037
	Average Daily Staff Attendance	95.088
	School Wide Attendance Score	95.370
Initial Score	**Initial Score (Average of 4 components)**	93.709
Additional Considerations	**Personalized Climate** Research/Evidence-based Program or Practice that supports the 4 components of School Climate = 5 points added	NA
	Unsafe School Choice Option USCO Distinction for 2 consecutive years = 1 Star removed USCO Distinction for 3 consecutive years = 2 Stars removed	NA
Final Score and Rating	**Final Score**	93.7
	Final Star Rating	★★★★

While there are four subsections of School Climate, for the purposes of this research, the only relevant sections of School Climate are the surveys.

Georgia Student Health Survey: The Georgia Student Health Survey is administered to students in grades 3–5, and the results of all surveys are calculated to determine a final score. This score is combined with the final scores of the personnel and parent surveys to determine an overall survey score. Throughout the student survey, students are asked to rate items about their personal perceptions of school on 11 separate indicators. Answer choices for student are "Always," "Often," "Sometimes," and "Never." Sample indicators include: "I like school," "My school has clear rules for behavior," and "I get along with other students." The Georgia Student Health Survey is listed in its entirety in Appendix B.

Georgia School Personnel Survey: The Georgia School Personnel Survey (Appendix C) is significantly longer than the student survey with 31 indicators. Answer choices for this survey include "Strongly Disagree," "Somewhat Disagree," "Somewhat Agree," and "Strongly Agree." Sample indicators include: "I feel like I am an important part of my school," "Teachers at my

school have high standards for achievement," and "Students at my school get along well with the teachers and other adults."

Georgia Parent Survey: The parent survey (Appendix D) is comparable to the personnel survey in length with 24 indicators. Additionally, the answer choices are the same as the personnel survey ("Strongly Disagree," "Somewhat Disagree," "Somewhat Agree," and "Strongly Agree"). Sample indicators for the parent survey include: "Teachers at my student's school work hard to make sure that students do well," "My student feels safe going to and from school," and "I feel comfortable talking to the teachers at my student's school."

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 presents an introduction to the study. This includes the background for the study, need for the study, purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, and a review of relevant terms for the study. Chapter 2 presents the review of literature focusing on principal behaviors (relationships, teaching and learning, and the external environment) and professional development of principals. Chapter 3 presents the methodology for this study including the research design, challenges of the study, participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, the researcher's role, and the theoretical lens. Chapter 4 analyzes the data and presents findings of the study. Chapter 5 includes the summary, conclusion, implications, and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This review of literature related to principal behaviors and their impacts on school climate and student achievement is divided into two main sections: impact of principal behaviors and school climate. The impact of principal behaviors includes the subsections of increasing teacher efficacy, instructional leadership, and professional development. The areas of school climate that are discussed include safety, relationships, principal relationship, teaching and learning, quality of instruction and the principal's role, classroom management, and student engagement.

Impact of Principal Behaviors

The principal is the catalyst for almost everything that goes on within a school. From student achievement to school climate and culture, the principal's fingerprints are on everything. The principal's behaviors and actions develop all matters such as the cleanliness of the school, communication with stakeholders, and all matters within the school. Through their management skills, instructional expertise, and their interpersonal skills, principals contribute to the success of their schools (Ebmeier, 2003; Holland, 2004). Additionally, "school leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions" (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006, p. 5). Three areas that are enormously important behaviors for principals are teacher efficacy, instructional leadership, and personal growth through professional development. Each of these behaviors has a powerful impact on the climate of the school.

Further exemplifying the connection between educational leadership and student achievement Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) developed 21 leadership responsibilities by conducting a meta-analysis of 70 studies on educational leadership. Each of these responsibilities

is correlated to increased levels of student achievement. Leadership within a school impacts all facets of the school day, as the building leader sets the tone for academic expectations, behavioral expectations, interactions between teachers and their colleagues, interactions between teachers and their students, and interactions between all faculty and staff and the community at large (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). With leadership having such an impact on the climate of the school as well as student achievement, it is clear to see the importance of the role the school leader plays. Table 1 represents the 21 leadership responsibilities and their correlations to student achievement.

In addition to the correlation that these responsibilities have to student achievement, each of these responsibilities can have a direct impact on school climate, as each interval of correlation falls within the 95% of the true correlation (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). Providing affirmation, being flexible, intellectually stimulating the faculty, being knowledgeable and involved in curriculum and instruction, being highly visible, and so on are elements that set the tone for a positive school climate (Hamre et al., 2013).

Table 1. *Leadership Responsibilities*

The 21 Responsibilities and Their Correlations (r) with Student Academic Achievement					
Responsibility	The Extent to Which the Principal…	Average *r*	95% CI	No. of Studies	No. of Schools
1. Affirmation	Recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failures	.19	.08 to .29	6	332
2. Change Agent	Is willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo	.25	.16 to .34	6	466
3. Contingent Rewards	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments	.24	.15 to .32	9	465
4. Communication	Establishes strong lines of communication with and among teachers and students	.23	.12 to .33	11	299
5. Culture	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation	.25	.18 to .31	15	819
6. Discipline	Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus	.27	.18 to .35	12	437
7. Flexibility	Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent	.28	.16 to .39	6	277
8. Focus	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention	.24	.19 to .29	44	1,619
9. Ideals/Beliefs	Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling	.22	.14 to .30	7	513
10. Input	Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies	.25	.18 to .32	16	669
11. Intellectual Stimulation	Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture	.24	.13 to .34	4	302
12. Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices	.20	.14 to .27	23	826
13. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices	.25	.15 to .34	10	368
14. Monitoring/ Evaluating	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning	.27	.22 to .32	31	1,129
15. Optimizer	Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations	.20	.13 to .27	17	724
16. Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines	.25	.16 to .33	17	456
17. Outreach	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders	.27	.18 to .35	14	478
18. Relationships	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff	.18	.09 to .26	11	505
19. Resources	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs	.25	.17 to .32	17	571
20. Situational Awareness	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems	.33	.11 to .51	5	91
21. Visibility	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students	.20	.11 to .28	13	477

Note: 95% CI stands for the interval of correlations within which one can be 95% sure the true correlation falls (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004, p. 43).

With the ever-changing educational landscape, principals can be overwhelmed with trying to determine ways to improve student success. Varying mandates from federal and state level governments, changes in societal expectations, and continually changing educational trends can lead principals to question their autonomy. However, when giving meaningful feedback, principals do have the power and authority to influence the climate of a school (Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005), which can have a direct effect on student achievement. Through the communications of beliefs, actions, and affect, the principal establishes the expectations of what the school climate will be under his leadership (Hamre et al., 2013; Leithwood et al., 2006). Therefore, it is imperative that principals have adequate professional development to ensure they are successful in affecting change within their school (Shields, 2010; Leigh Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011).

Increasing Teacher Efficacy

One of the most vital practices a principal can employ is dealing with teacher efficacy. Walker and Slear (2011), emphasized that principals should learn and understand how to positively affect the efficacy of the teachers. Principal behaviors can influence teachers beyond curriculum and instruction. The influence of these behaviors can have a large impact on the teachers' confidence in their ability to help students learn. Daily interactions between the principal and teachers as well as the level of care the principal exhibits for the teachers as individuals can have an impact on teacher effectiveness (Barnett & McCormick, 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). Multiple studies across the last four decades (Armor, et al., 1976; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Kelley & Finnigan, 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007) indicated as teachers' efficacy is increased, higher results in student achievement occur. Additionally, in a study conducted by Pendergast, Garvis, and Keogh (2011), it was determined that the greater a beginning teacher's self-efficacy is, the less likely the teacher

would be to leave the profession. Pendergast et al. (2011) further explained that regardless of the years of experience of the teacher, self-efficacy was increased when the teacher felt support from administration. These studies further support the importance of the behaviors of principals and the effects they have on their schools.

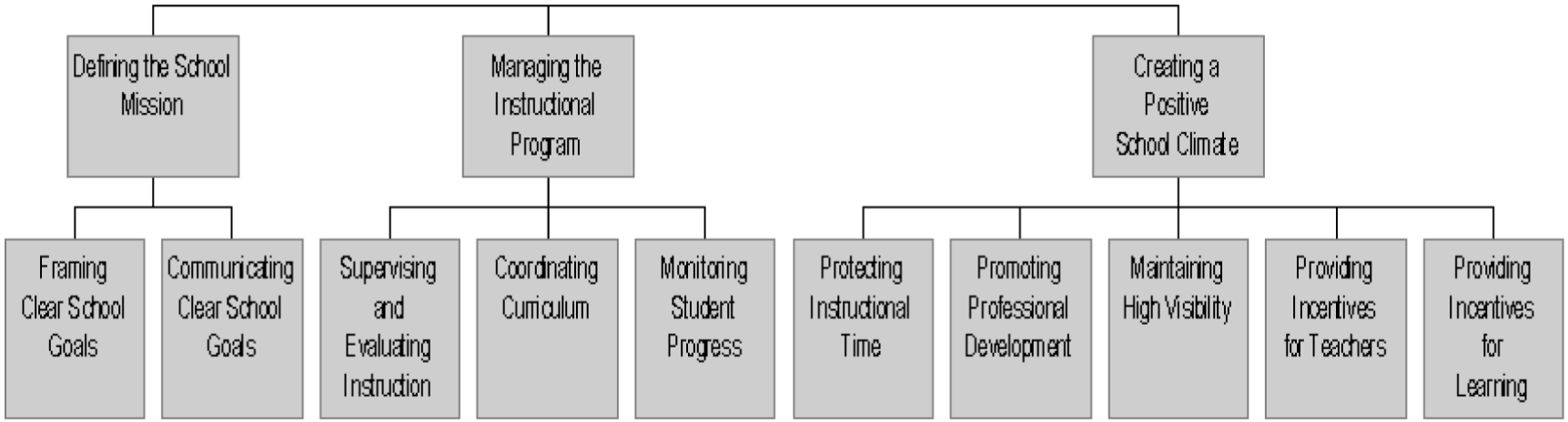
Godard and Skrla (2006) conducted a study of school characteristics reported by 1,981 teachers and correlated them with teachers' reported levels of efficacy. Factors such as socioeconomic status, student achievement, and faculty experience accounted for less than half the difference in efficacy. Based on this research, principals have the chance to develop efficacy for their teachers through the experiences the principal provides (Protheroe, 2008). Additionally, through a study of elementary school teachers who participated in a study group related to instruction, Pfaff (2000) discovered that survey data revealed participating teachers felt more effective after their involvement and made impactful changes to their teaching styles and use of instructional strategies. This study exemplifies the impact that a principal has on all aspects of the school, as sound instructional leadership helps shape the instructional strategies that teachers implement in their classrooms.

Instructional Leadership

When reviewing research on educational leadership in the 21st century, the model that has been used most frequently in empirical investigations is Hallinger's model of instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2012; Hallinger, 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). This model contains three specific dimensions: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive learning climate (Hallinger, 2008; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). These three instructional leadership dimensions are further broken down into 10 functions of instructional leadership: framing the school's goals, communicating the school's goals, supervising and evaluating instruction, curricular coordination, monitoring student progress,

protecting instructional time, providing incentives for teachers, providing incentives for learning, promoting professional development, and maintaining high visibility. Figure 1 represents the three instructional leadership dimensions and the 10 functions of these dimensions.

Figure 9. *Model of Instructional Leadership*



(Hallinger & Murphy, 1985)

The first dimension, “Defining the School’s Mission,” is made up of two functions, “Framing the School’s Goals” and “Communicating the School’s Goals.” This dimension emphasizes the principal’s role in ensuring that the faculty and staff have clear goals that focus on student achievement. Additionally, it is the principal’s role to ensure these goals are effectively communicated throughout the school community (Hallinger, 2012).

There are three functions that make up the second dimension, “Managing the Instructional Program.” These functions include “Supervising and Evaluating Instruction,” “Coordinating Curriculum,” and “Monitoring Student Progress.” “Managing the Instructional Program” obliges the principal to be deeply engaged in motivating, supervising, and monitoring teaching and learning in the school (Hallinger, 2012). These functions require the principal to have a vested commitment to the school’s improvement.

“Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate,” the third dimension, includes five functions. They are as follows, “Protecting Instructional Time,” “Promoting Professional Development,” “Maintaining High Visibility,” “Providing Incentives for Teachers,” and “Providing Incentives for Learning.” This dimension follows the belief that effective schools place high regards on academics through the development of high standards and expectations for students and teachers (Hallinger, 2012).

While these three dimensions and 10 functions give a clear model of instructional leadership, putting all of this into motion may require additional support and training for the principal. It is imperative to the success of the school that the principal have supports as well as professional learning to effectively institute instructional leadership. “Providing principals with the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes becomes increasingly important in relation to the difficulties faced by a dynamic and changing educational culture” (Mestry & Singh, 2007, p. 478).

Professional Development

"Pick the right school leader and great teachers will come and stay. Pick the wrong one and, over time, good teachers leave, mediocre ones stay, and the school gradually (or not so gradually) declines. Reversing the impact of a poor principal can take years" (Mitgang, 2008, p. 3). For teachers to receive the appropriate instructional guidance from their principal, the principal must first obtain the skills necessary to effectively lead the school instructionally. For this to occur, the principal must receive professional learning that develops efficacy for the leader. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC, 2000) explained that professional learning for school leaders must be long term, carefully planned, and job embedded, with the focus on student achievement. Moreover, provided professional learning, that meets the aforementioned criteria, principals have a greater likelihood of feeling successful in their roles as instructional leaders. "Finding practical ways to thoughtfully and appropriately assess and develop leaders can have an important impact on the quality of leadership, and through that, on the quality of education in our schools" (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2007, p. 1). As principals increase their capabilities within their role as leaders, there is a greater likelihood that increases in student achievement will occur. Leithwood (2010) proposed that building the instructional leadership capacities of principals leads to improvement in student learning.

According to the Wallace Foundation (2013), "Principals are unlikely to proceed with a leadership style focused on learning if the district and state are unsupportive, disinterested or pursuing other agendas" (p. 16). Honig et al. (2010) explained that school district offices need to be "re-cultured" or altered to better enhance the work of teaching and learning. In other words, district-level personnel need to provide professional development for principals focused more on improving instruction and less on school operations/administration.

Clark, Martorell, and Rockoff (2009) reported that providing educational leaders with specific professional learning opportunities has produced positive results in increasing the effectiveness of school principals. “However, when the Wallace Foundation interviewed principals across nine states, most gave their districts low marks for providing quality professional development” (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010, p. 23). Additionally, Seashore-Louis et al. (2010) stated that instructional school leaders “interviewed by the Wallace Foundation believed that districts can have the greatest role in improving their effectiveness by providing strong guidance on curricular and instructional improvements and guidelines to help shape and support motivation for change within their own schools” (p. 3).

Areas of School Climate

An increasing amount of research suggests that school climate has a large impact on student success; therefore, when assessing components contributing to school success, the climate must be taken into consideration (Center for Social and Emotional Education, n.d.; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). The Center for Social and Emotional Education (n.d.) defined *school climate* as “the quality and character of school life” that is “based on patterns of students’, parents’, and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (p. 5).

The school climate encompasses invisible forces that can be felt almost immediately. Factors such as student motivation, a sense of respect and trust, teacher motivation, parent involvement, order and discipline, a feeling of cohesiveness, and positive teacher-student relationships are evident to all those who enter a school building (Haynes, Emmons, & Comer, 1993; Johnson, Johnson, & Zimmerman, 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 1997; Loukas, 2007). The answers to all of these questions come within moments upon entering the school, and each of

these responses shapes the invisible forces of school climate. A very powerful concept that helps shape people's opinion of the school, reflects in the attitudes of those within the school, and has become a popular topic of discussion pertaining to school success is school climate (Voight, Austin, & Hanson, 2013). Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013) described school climate as "a product of social interactions among students and teachers, is influenced by educational and social values, and has been shown to relate to social situations within classrooms and to the school as a whole" (p. 599).

Accountability

The term *accountability system* refers to the processes and procedures of holding schools, educators, and students responsible for academic results (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2004). Academic results are most often determined by the results on a battery of high-stakes test. Moreover, Cohen, Pickeral, and McCloskey (2009) argue that the impact school climate can have on a school and the effects of climate on student learning have not been adequately interpreted into our accountability systems. Although school climate may be difficult to interpret within the accountability system, it is essential for school leaders to understand and shape the climate of their school in the most positive fashion possible. Research indicates that when the basic needs of students, parents, teachers, staff, and stakeholders are met, the overall climate of the school is positive and academic challenges are met with success (Bradshaw, Waasdrop, & O'Brennan, 2010).

School Climate

School climate affects the feelings and interactions within a school; therefore, a positive school climate fosters a greater chance that students will find school more enjoyable than those who are in a school where the climate is less than positive. Cohen et al. (2009) explained, "There are clearly complex sets of forces that shape the quality and character of each school,

and we have much to learn about the specific needs of different types of schools. What is clear is that school climate matters" (p. 187). Students, teachers, and support staff will all benefit from a positive school climate (Bradshaw, Waasdrop, & O'Brennan, 2010).

As teachers feel supported by administration and a sense of shared governance is established, teachers will be more likely to share openly thoughts and ideas with their fellow teachers. Research indicates that educators report higher levels of commitment and greater collegiality when they feel supported by their administration (Sharp, 2009). Additionally, schools that have open communications among colleagues, have support from administration, and have strong teacher-student relationships typically have enhanced academic and behavioral outcomes (Brown & Medway, 2007). As students and teachers develop strong positive relationships, the opportunity for open and honest dialogue regarding both personal and school related topics is increased. When open dialogue is coupled with respect and dignity, constructive feedback can be given with a reduced fear of failure.

To truly assess school climate, one must understand the meaning of *climate*. The National School Climate Center (2017) recommended that *school climate* and a *positive and sustained school climate* be defined in the following ways:

> School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.

A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing, and satisfying life in a democratic society. This climate includes:

- norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe;
- people being engaged and respected;
- students, families, and educators working together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision;
- educators modeling and nurturing attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning; and
- each person contributing to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment.

To further support the power of school climate, Pechackova, Navrailova, and Slavikova (2013) stated,

> School climate has an impact on social behavior of pupils, their motivation to learn and learning outcomes. We can expect in favorable climates an increase of school effectiveness and mainly therefore the researches of school climate have been recently in the last period of accentuated category." (p. 719)

While there are a myriad of components that make up a school's climate, the four major areas that virtually all researchers agree unmistakably shape the climate of a school are as follows: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the external environment (Cohen et al. 2009; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2009; Green, 2015). Principal behaviors and instructional leadership knowledge have been viewed as characteristics that have influenced climate and culture in schools (Bulach, Boothe, & Pickett, 2006). During this study, this researcher will investigate the leadership roles that impact the factors of safety, relationships, and teaching and learning.

Safety

When considering the safety of a school, one must not merely look at the school as a fortress in which to keep intruders out. To truly and comprehensively evaluate the safety of a school, internal factors that can have a direct effect on climate should be considered. According to Bucher and Manning (2005), "A safe school is a place where the business of education can be conducted in a welcoming environment free of intimidation, violence, and fear" (p. 57). If the feeling of safety is a fundamental human need (Maslow, 1943), one can easily see the importance of promoting a social, emotional, physical, and intellectual safe environment for students. Devine and Cohen (2007) explained that feeling safe in school increases student learning and promotes healthy development. To ensure the safety of all students, it is imperative that schools develop a comprehensive safety plan that covers all aspects of support for student safety. Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, and Pollitt (2013) suggested that "schools must be supported to develop an active school safety team that focuses on overall school climate as well as crisis and emergency preparedness, response, and recovery" (p. 6). Crisis response and emergency preparedness are important factors of school safety, but when considering safety as it relates to school climate, school personnel must ensure that behavioral expectations are clear, discipline is enforced with consistency, and the teachers and staff treat all students with respect and dignity. The results of a study conducted by Gregory et al. (2010), where a statewide random sample in which more than 7,300 ninth-grade students and 2,900 teachers from 290 high schools were selected, determined that students felt safer when adults were caring, available, and consistent in their enforcement of discipline.

Relationships

Relationships within a school setting can have a major impact on school climate, as "the process of teaching and learning is fundamentally relational" (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-

D'Alessanero, 2013, p. 7). While relationships within a school include, but are not limited to, student and teacher, peer to peer, and the relationship between the principal and stakeholders, throughout this study, the researcher will focus on a myriad of principal relationships. The principal's relationships can be a catalyst for other relationships within the building and can have a powerful effect on school climate.

Principal Relationships

The principal of a school can have the largest impact on climate and culture through the relationships he establishes. The principal is the catalyst for the relationships that are established within his school. Education is a people profession, and it is vital that strong, positive relationships are established throughout the school community. If the principal only focuses on the management aspects of the school, such as educational reforms, policies, and procedures, the most important aspect of the job is missed: the people (Shields, 2006). When the principal has developed sound relationships and proven that he is competent, the parents, teachers, and students will feel more comfortable and confident with the decisions that he has to make.

Student to teacher, peer to peer, and student engagement to academic achievement can all be affected by the relationships and expectations developed by the principal. "The single most important factor common to successful change is that relationships improve. If relationships improve, the school gets better. If relationships remain the same or get worse, ground is lost" (Fullan, 2002, p. 17).

According to Vieno, Perkins, Smith, and Santinello (2005), the principal must establish positive relationships with his faculty and staff and model the same expectations (relationship building) for those working directly with students if he expects that positive relationships will occur between teachers and students. Modeling positive relationships is imperative, as a positive teacher-student relationship will develop a positive school climate, subsequently possibly

enhancing student academic success by increasing motivational, behavioral, and emotional factors related to student engagement through the development of a sense of belonging for the students (Vieno et al., 2005).

With the realization that relationships have a far-reaching impact on most every aspect of the school, it is important for the principal to demonstrate sincerity through his actions. Stronge, Richards, and Catano (2008) stated, "Some of the ways leaders can demonstrate their sincerity include

- Listening to others (Fullan, 2001; Kouzes & Ponzer, 2002).
- Seeking input from stakeholders (Marzano et al., 2005).
- Doing what they say they will do (Kouzes & Posner, 2005).
- Ongoing visibility and participation in school activities and operations (Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005).
- Diagnosing the needs of the individual school and school community and seeking resources to address needs (Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Portin et al., 2003).
- Respecting existing school and community cultures and traditions (Cotton, 2003; Portin et al., 2003).
- Decision making based on student safety and achievement above all else (Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005).
- Understanding areas of change needed in the school (Fullan, 2002; Marzano et al., 2005).
- Not tolerating ineffective teaching (Fullan, 2005; Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004; Mendro, 1998), ensuring that "the wrong people get off the bus" (Collins, 2001).

- Demonstrating confidence in school staff to assist in problem solving and leadership capacities (Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Spillane et al., 2001).
- Remaining current with best practices in education (Boris-Schacter & Merrifield, 2000; Kouzes & Posner, 2002).
- Supporting staff as professionals and as individuals (Cotton, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Portin et al., 2003). (pp. 21–22)

Shields (2006) stated:

> The educational leader needs to recognize that relationships are a fundamental and intrinsic part of being; we cannot separate our existence from our relationships. Hence, leadership activities that focus unduly on the technical and bureaucratic elements of an organization are devoid of meaning. Educational leaders who acknowledge that human interactions are basic to our lives, to the creation of meaning, and to the development of understanding are more likely to take full account of the *why*, *who*, *what*, *where*, and *when* of schooling. (p. 76)

When the principal demonstrates many of characteristics listed above, teachers, students, and community members become comfortable with and trust the decisions of the principal. The principal is the catalyst for the relationships that are established within his school. If the principal only focuses on the management aspects of the school, such as educational reforms, policies, and procedures, the most important aspect of the job is missed: the people (Shields, 2006). Education is a people profession and it is vital that strong positive relationships are established throughout the school community. When the principal has developed sound relationships and proven that he is competent, the parents, teachers, and students will feel more comfortable and confident with the decisions that he has to make.

Principal Visibility

The principal must be highly visible and approachable to establish relationships and shape the culture and climate of the school (Rieg, 2008). One way for the principal to be visible to the faculty and staff is to frequently visit classrooms and participate in grade- or team-level meetings (Elmore, 2000; Fink & Resnick, 2001). If teachers are expected to establish relationships built upon respect and caring, school leaders must model, encourage, and demonstrate the importance of positive relationships and interactions (Shields, 2006). Additionally, principals must understand the importance of and be willing to seek input from stakeholders when making decisions relative to the school (Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). Alongside of building relationships and seeking input from all stakeholders, effective principals must be able to unite all stakeholders around the goal of increasing student performance (Lashway, 2003). Once the concept of shared governance is developed, an effective principal can develop and depend upon input regarding leadership decision from an assortment of stakeholders (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Therefore, having student progress and achievement driving the decisions that the principal makes, the climate and culture of the school will be one that is academically based, also setting the tone for the school for students, teachers, and community members alike. Waters et al. (2003) determined that school leadership correlates positively with student achievement. To further evidence the role a principal plays in regards to student achievement, Cotton (2003) explained that several decades of research demonstrated the positive relationship between principals' practices and student academic achievement.

Teaching and Learning

Regardless of all the other components that are involved in a school, teaching and learning are at the epicenter of school climate. "Teaching and learning represents one of the most

important dimensions of school climate" (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 9). There are many elements that must be considered when determining the effects that a teacher has on the learners, the climate of their classroom, and ultimately, the school as a whole. Each classroom within the school is an element of the whole, and the teacher is the leader who sets the tone for learning within the classroom. Everything from quality of instruction, classroom management, engagement of the learners, and the relationships that are developed can have an impact on the learning that takes place. (McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003; Wong, Wong, Rogers, & Brooks, 2012; Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Klem & Connell, 2004).

Quality of Instruction and the Principal's Role

The quality of the instruction students receive is paramount to student academic success. Teacher quality consistently is regarded as having the greatest impact on student achievement (Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2000). The Center for High Impact Philanthropy (2010) defines a high-quality teacher as:

> A quality teacher is one who has a positive effect on student learning and development through a combination of content mastery, command of a broad set of pedagogic skills, and communications/interpersonal skills. Quality teachers are life-long learners in their subject areas, teach with commitment, and are reflective upon their teaching practice. They transfer knowledge of their subject matter and the learning process through good communication, diagnostic skills, understanding of different learning styles and cultural influences, knowledge about child development, and the ability to marshal a broad array of techniques to meet student needs. They set high expectations and support students in achieving them. They establish an environment conducive to learning, and leverage available

resources outside as well as inside the classroom (p. 7).

Several studies have shown that students who participate in high-caliber early childhood education programs have better grades and a higher promotion rate to the next grade; require fewer services such as remediation or tutoring; are better focused and engage in school work with higher frequency; have a higher probability of graduating high school; and have a lower risk of participating in illegal activities versus students who do not (Frede, Jung, Barnett, & Figueras, 2009; Ackerman, 2005; Bueno, Darling-Hammond, & Gonzales 2010). Student achievement levels can be associated with the variances in the levels of the effectiveness of teachers (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2008). With the knowledge of the impact that quality instruction has on the academic impact of student achievement, it is the responsibility of the teachers to find ways to educate all children as well as to participate in professional development that enhances their teaching abilities (Ballard & Bates, 2008). To increase quality instruction, teachers need to be involved in practices such as differentiated instruction, data-driven instruction, and identifying areas of academic weakness for students (Ballard & Bates, 2008). Gallagher (2002) explains that teachers are the strongest determining factor of student achievement when external factors are controlled.

The principal's role in quality of instruction is vital to teacher success. As the instructional leader of the building, the principal must set the standard for what is expected academically. It is imperative that the principal understands the instructional strengths and weaknesses of each of his teachers and he must determine teacher professional development based upon his assessments. The principal must be a motivator who offers guidance and support in the areas that teachers need improvement (Eyal & Roth, 2011). He must be able to analyze data to determine trends within individual classrooms and the school as a whole. In order to effectively improve the quality of instruction within the classrooms, the principal must be viewed

as the instructional expert of the building. Additionally, the principal must ensure that he hires highly qualified, self-motivated teachers who have the desire to help students achieve at their highest level.

Moreover, it is vital for the principal to be viewed as a competent and strong instructional leader. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) defined *instructional leadership* as "leading learning communities." Based upon the aforementioned definition, principals should strive to facilitate and encourage a community of collaboration between teachers and administration to resolve issues with their school (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) emphasized that effective principals monitor student progress through data that they utilize to guide instructional decisions.

Classroom Management

Principals expect today's teachers to employ strong classroom management techniques that provide students with an environment that is free from disruption and conducive to learning. "Classroom management refers to all the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time, and materials so that student learning can take place" (Wong et al., 2012, p. 61). Dunbar (2004) stated, "Inappropriate behavior significantly disrupts individual learning, social acceptance, and opportunities for inclusion into the society at large" (p. 1). To achieve a rich learning environment that limits disruptions, teachers must ensure that there are clear behavioral expectations as well as the natural consequences for not meeting these expectations. However, it must also be clear that there are positive consequences for making good choices within the classroom. "With each choice comes a consequence, either desirable or undesirable" (Dunbar, 2004, p. 4). When there are clear behavior expectations in place, students can take ownership of their own behaviors, thus increasing the possibility of reducing disruptions to the learning environment. When this occurs, students will have more time to focus on their own learning. By

increasing the amount of time that students spend actively engaged in the learning process, the potential for higher academic achievement will increase as well (Wong & Wong, 2001). Further studies indicate that the application of a strong classroom management system has a positive effect on reducing disruptions while increasing academic achievement (Oliver, Wehby, & Reschly, 2011; Wong & Wong, 2001).

Student Engagement

If one is to get a true sense of a school's climate, student engagement must be looked at closely. Students who are actively engaged in the learning process are more successful in school by many measures (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). As evidenced by Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, and Hall (2003), students who observe school rules, have good attendance, and do not engage in disruptive behaviors typically have better classroom grades and score higher on standardized tests. Through recent studies, *student engagement* can be defined as a multidimensional construct made up of behaviors, emotions, and cognitions (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003). However, Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) pointed out that behaviors, emotions, and cognitions have not been inspected together in many studies that examined these components. Related literature showed that typically emotional and behavioral engagements were studied and determined that a student's performance in school is derived from their self-perceptions, goal orientations, and autonomy (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994). Emotional and behavioral engagement is difficult to measure largely in part due to the fact that it is cognitive based. Regardless of the components measured, many studies have shown that there is a positive association between student engagement and academic achievement (Park, 2005; Furlong & Christenson, 2008; Carini, Kuh, & Klien, 2006; Coates, 2005).

While there is significant research to show the correlation of student engagement to

student achievement, educators must determine how they can better involve students in taking responsibility for their own learning truly to engage them. In a student survey conducted by Willms, Friesen, and Milton (2009), students surveyed expressed a desire to interact with people within and beyond the classroom or school setting. Results from *Imagine a School, Design for Learning*, and *What Did You Do in School Today?* consistently show that:

- Students want stronger relationships with teachers, with each other, and with their communities—locally, provincially, nationally and globally. They want their teachers to know them as people.
- Students want their teachers to know how they learn. They want their teachers to take into account what they understand and what they misunderstand, and to use this knowledge as a starting place to guide their continued learning.
- Students want their teachers to establish learning environments that build interdependent relationships and promote and create a strong culture of learning. (p. 36)

The previous studies prove the importance of student engagement and the desire that students have to be engaged in the learning environment and beyond.

Summary

School climate is a multifaceted entity in which the various pieces develop the whole. Many studies (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008; Khoury-Kassabri, Benbenishty, & Astor, 2005; Loukas, 2007; Marshall, 2004) have examined multiple factors that develop the climate of a school and give the school its own unique feeling. The central element of all the various factors is the people who populate the school. Teachers, students, community members, and leadership all play a vital role in creating the climate of a school. At the heart of it all are the relationships that are established that make the climate of the school one that is desirable or undesirable. How

students interact with one another, the bonds formed between the students and teachers, and most importantly, the relationships the principal establishes with all stakeholders have a direct impact on the climate of a school. It is the goal of the researcher to determine if there are discernable behaviors that leaders have in common for schools with high climate/culture ratings and high achievement. Additionally, this researcher intends to determine if principal practices and behaviors of “high-high” schools can be informative to the field of principal professional development to enhance positive school climate and culture and student academic performance.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Finding a solution to a problem requires investigative research that follows a specific and logical order (Merriam, 2009). This study followed the model of basic research. The use of basic research drives this desire to improve methodical circumstances and practices (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) explained that the premise of qualitative research involves behavior of individuals; therefore, this research is an inductive process. Working with an inductive process, the researcher built concepts from gathered data, using observations and understandings to construct theories, and combined evidence from interviews and documents to create the larger themes to ultimately develop the findings.

The purpose of this study is to gain a clear understanding of principal behaviors in high achieving/high climate elementary schools in North Georgia and the impact of these behaviors on future principal professional learning practices. The methodology was guided by the following research questions: Are there discernable behaviors that leaders have in common for schools with high climate and culture ratings and high achievement? Can principal practices and behaviors of "high-high" schools be informative to the field of principal professional development to enhance positive school climate and culture and student academic performance?

An intellectual interest with a goal of broadening knowledge is what drives basic research (Merriam, 2009). A qualitative approach was utilized throughout this study, as this methodology allowed for greater insight as to the practices and behaviors of principals in schools with high student achievement and high climate ratings.

The researcher found it evident that a case study was the most appropriate choice to support the qualitative design of the proposed research. A case study aims to answer phenomenological issues of real-life situations, where a change is desired (Yin, 1981). The

purpose of this study was to gain a clear understanding of principal behaviors in high achieving/high climate elementary schools and the impact of these behaviors on future principal professional development practices. This was achieved by speaking directly with principals, collecting data from anecdotal conversations, as well as collecting data from a myriad of surveys. "Case studies typically combine data collection methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaires, and observations" (Huberman & Miles, 2002, p. 6). Therefore, the compilation of qualitative data will provide further information in relevance to this study.

Research Design and Approach

Research follows a logical order regarding an inquiry or investigation into a specific topic (Merriam, 2009). This section is divided into two sub-sections; design and approach. The researcher will define and defend reasoning for employing a qualitative design. Furthermore, an in-depth explanation of a case study will be supported.

Design

Collected data and drawn conclusions link the initial questions of the study to a qualitative research design. Merriam (2009) conveyed that five main characteristics make up qualitative research: process, understanding and meaning, the researcher collecting and analyzing the data, the inductive process, and providing the reader with an abundantly descriptive product. A qualitative researcher strives to comprehend how individuals interpret their own experiences, how they build significance of their surroundings, and how they connect their experience from the environment around them (Merriam, 2009). Moreover, qualitative researchers are led by questions of *how* or *what*—therefore, driving complex processes, exploration, and discovery (Yin, 2009). It is when saturation of information occurs that the researcher can begin the process of analysis to identify patterns and conceptual relationships.

The basis for qualitative research is to improve current situations (Stake, 2010). Using individual experiences, specific events, or unique situations, the researcher will construct a case study to respond to the research questions that will guide this study. Currently, educational leaders in one North Georgia School District are not giving enough attention to climate, as no elementary school in the district has received a 5-star climate rating based upon the GSHS 2.0. In this study the researcher examined the views of administrative leaders as they pertain to school climate and the effects on student achievement.

Approach

Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) explained that a case study examines and compares a multitude of cases as a means to glean greater insight into a particular issue. A phenomenological case study approach was utilized to better determine the perceptions of principals in regards to school climate and the effects on student achievement. Lodico et al. (2010) expressed that in qualitative research, the case study approach is the most widely utilized. Merriam (2009) explained that researchers utilizing a case study will typically focus on individuals within a common group and describe their experiences within the specific setting. This researcher used eight elementary school principals for the interview process during this study. The building-level principals were selected based upon overall College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) ratings coupled with the Climate Star Ratings for their schools. The CCRPI is comprised of data pertaining to student achievement, while the Climate Star Ratings are made up of results from the Georgia School Personnel Climate Survey (Appendix B), the Georgia Parent School Climate Survey (Appendix C), and the Georgia Elementary School Climate Survey (Appendix D).

Huberman and Miles (2002) further explained that the first step in conducting a case study is to define the research questions to set the focus for the study. Throughout this research,

discovered perceptions of leaders as to the effects of school climate on student achievement were achieved. This was completed through the use of interviews, surveys, and documentation.

Theoretical Lens

To challenge existing knowledge, a formulation of theories is developed to explain, predict, and understand occurrences. For several decades, theorists have considered the importance of climate in school. As stated by Harrington (2014), Trickett and Moos (1973) proposed a very influential, conceptual framework that suggested that classroom climate assessment should address three primary conceptual dimensions: Relationships, Personal Growth or Goal Orientation, and System Maintenance and Change.

One theoretical framework that supports the research study regarding school climate and achievement is the System Maintenance and Change by Rudolph Moos. This system was developed by Moos in the 1960s and 1970s and sought to operationalize and measure underlying dimensions of diverse social environments (Holahan, 2002). There are three dimensions to the theory of System Maintenance and Change: order and organization, clarity, and control and innovation. *Order and organization* focuses on the emphasis of student behavior and the quality and organization of the classroom assignments and planned activities. *Clarity* mandates that rules, expectations, and consequences in the classroom must be well defined and leave no doubt. Moreover, when *control and innovation* is evident in the classroom, students become active learners while advocating for their own educational experiences (Kwek, 2011).

Participants/Settings

Participants for this study were selected after the schools had been populated in the quadrant using statistical data results based upon the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI), which is the Georgia Accountability system. Each of the eight principals selected had achievement and climate ratings in the high achievement/high climate quadrant.

These eight principals were interviewed for this study. Each of these principals were selected from one of the 24 public elementary schools in one northern Georgia County. A representative from the school district who oversees the higher education research verified that each of these schools is in the high achievement/high climate quadrant in support of this study based on the State Longitudinal Data Quadrants. Additionally, each of the principals selected was sent an initial e-mail requesting their willingness to participate in this study (see Appendix E). The e-mail contained information about the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and interview process.

This specific northern Georgia County is comprised of six high schools with a population range of approximately 1,750–2,500 students, seven middle schools with a population range of approximately 1,150–1,500 students, and 24 elementary schools with a population range of approximately 300–1,350 students. Additionally, there are three pre-K centers, one special education center, one alternative learning center, and one evening program. The overall population for the school district is approximately 42,000 students. Classrooms within the district reported student-teacher ratios that adhere to state-mandated guidelines. Of the 2,459 teachers employed by the school district, 43.9% had earned master's degrees, 23.4% had earned specialist's degrees, 2.3% had earned doctorate degrees, and 40.87 % are gifted certified. Additionally, 99% of all teachers were teaching in their endorsement area. Approximately 5.44% of the population are English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), 12.63% receive special education services, and 30.58% receive free/reduced lunches. The overall graduation rate for the district is 86%. Specific information pertaining to each school selected for qualitative data collection and analysis will be included once the analysis, including the correlation analysis, is complete (North Georgia School District Used in This Study, 2016).

Ethical Protection of Participants

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has the responsibility of protecting the participants taking part in research (Cook & Hoas, 2011). The researcher has a critical responsibility to the participants in the study as well as the profession they represent of ensuring research ethics are utilized throughout the study (Lodico et al., 2010). Prior to beginning this study, the researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training in accordance with IRB requirements and received approval from Kennesaw State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A).Along with submitting to the university IRB, the researcher was also required to submit his study to his local IRB for approval.

Based on IRB procedure as outlined by Lodico et al. (2010) the researcher included a cover letter that detailed description of the study, description of participants, any compensation the participants may receive, analysis of potential risks and benefits to the participants, and a description of the process for obtaining informed consent. In the description of the study, the research included a thorough review of literature that supports the study, including research questions, chosen research method, significance of research, and the setting. Participant descriptions included their credentials, the sampling procedure, and a consent form from the county's superintendent. Furthermore, additional information provided to the IRB will include potential risks and how, if any, benefits would outweigh the stated risks involved with taking part in this study. Finally, it is imperative to include a projected plan for debriefing activities.

Three important aspects to consider regarding human research studies are (a) justice, (b) beneficence, and (c) respect for persons (Lindorff, 2010). In terms of research, *justice* entails that the participants will be free of the encumbrance of time, energy, or distress if others will be acquiring the rewards. *Beneficence* prevents the participants, who agree to participate of their own free will, from experiencing pain or embarrassment from the results of the study, during or

after. In regards to *respect for persons*, all information about the individual will be kept confidential, participants will be reassured that they can withdraw from the study at any time without recourse, and final results will be shared with participants.

Considering the protections of participants, the researcher elected to utilize pseudonyms, further ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants (Crow and Wiles, 2008). By using pseudonyms, the researcher improved the participants' understanding that every effort has been made to ensure that the data they provided could not be traced back to the participants.

Upon IRB approval from Kennesaw State University, the researcher submitted IRB forms to the local school board for review and approval. Once approval had been granted from the local school board, the researcher approached potential principals via e-mail. The researcher's topic and request for participation was included in the e-mail. An informed consent, which was completed and returned, was provided to those participants who had graciously accepted the invitation for research cooperation. Participants arrived at an agreed-upon meeting place with a survey that was previously provided via e-mail along with any documentation of strategies that have proven successful. Upon arrival, the researcher reiterated to the participant their option to opt out of the study with no recourse. At the conclusion of our meeting, the researcher informed the participants that records of the surveys, interviews, and documents would be kept for a minimum of five years; at that point, they would be destroyed. There was no prior contact with participants regarding any aspect of this study in meeting with Kennesaw State University's IRB expectations.

Data Collection

Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry, such as case studies or participant observations, which help individuals understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption to the natural setting as possible (Creswell,

2003). Merriman (1998) explained that the key assumption upon which all types of qualitative research is based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. The qualitative data collection consisted of conducting individual interviews. The instruments that were used are the semi-structured interview protocols. The protocols were assessed for trustworthiness and credibility.

According to Patton (2002), qualitative research encompasses the researcher conducting fieldwork and acting as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. In this study the researcher used interviews as a qualitative method to examine and describe how principals perceive the climate of their school and the effects that the climate has on student achievement.

Interviews. The data gathered in this study was a result of the semi-structured interviews using an interview protocol (see Appendix F) with eight principals from the quadrant of high achievement and high climate. While there was no prior observation at each school, this method of interview was the most appropriate, as it allowed for open-ended questions to give the interviewee the opportunity to expand on their strategies used regarding climate and student achievement within their own school. The interviews included questions pertaining to school climate and student achievement, principal behaviors, and specific strategies. Through the use of interviews, the researcher becomes more familiar with each individual participant being interviewed (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), thus giving a distinctive voice to the climate surveys. The same set of questions was utilized for all participants interviewed.

Prior to the actual interviews, the researcher selected a comfortable location at each principal's school to carry out the individual interviews. It was made clear to all participants that the interviews would take no more than 45 minutes of their time. Furthermore, participants were made well aware that the utilization of both handwritten notes as well as recording devices would be utilized during the interview to document body language as well as voice inflection.

Each participant was given a "consent to participate" form that included permission to record the interview session (Appendix G). As a further safeguard, the researcher reminded each participant that a recording device would be employed during the interview to insure the researcher had their full permission to record the interview. Upon the completion of the interview, the researcher transcribed the interview verbatim. Surveys. For the purposes of data collection, the researcher collected from the following sources: statistical survey data, interviews, and climate ratings. The researcher sent out an intake survey via e-mail to gain knowledge of the participants' professional background, which was returned via e-mail as well (Appendix F). Once all intake surveys were returned, interview times were scheduled. While it was the researcher's goal to conduct all interviews in a face-to-face setting, phone interviews were offered if necessary to benefit the participant. All participants opted for a face-to-face interview. According to Best and Kahn (2003), interviews are superior compared to other methods of data collection.

Data Analysis

There are multiple steps for effective qualitative data analysis. Creswell (2012) described six steps in analyzing and interpreting qualitative data. The six steps include: (1) initial exploring of data by coding, (2) using codes to develop a general idea of the data, (3) using codes to find themes, (4) representing findings through narratives and visuals, (5) interpreting the meaning of the results, and (6) conducting strategies to validate the findings. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) identified three sections of qualitative analysis: (1) selecting, simplifying, and transforming data; (2) organizing information for coding and "teasing out" themes; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification of data. Additionally, Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended analyzing data early because it helps the researcher "cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data"

(p. 50). Furthermore, Ratcliff (2008) explained that data analysis can be completed at the same time the data collection is conducted.

To assist in the organizational process, data was organized by identifying common information from participants, such as the same ideas, practices, and theories. When analyzing data from interviews, the researcher coded information utilizing the computer software program Atlas.ti. The researcher began the coding process by randomly selecting a document and summarizing the central idea by placing a few keywords in the margin. The process was repeated with each additional document (Creswell, 2012).

The purpose of coding allows the researcher to identify developing themes that are consistent throughout the data that has been collected. For the initial coding, the researcher analyzed every interview to identify recurring terms. Responses from each participant's interview allow for the themes and codes to surface. Upon completion of all document coding, the researcher sought out commonalities that allowed for the reduction of number while minimalizing repetition (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010).

Using Axial Coding, the researcher initially identified six main categories. Boeije (2010) concisely explained that the purpose of Axial Coding is

> to determine which [codes] in the research are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones . . . [and to] reorganize the data set: synonyms are crossed out; redundant codes are removed and the best representative codes are selected (p. 109).

As categories continued to be analyzed, subthemes began to emerge; rather than serving as dominant themes, they actually became subsets of the main three themes. When categories were established, using the terms most frequently cited in the interviews, the researcher used the categories to further identify themes that were further reduced into three dominant themes: data, communication, and relationships.

Once data was analyzed and categorized into themes and subthemes, abbreviations in the form of codes were identified for the topics, and the researcher wrote the codes next to the appropriate segments of each interviewee's text.

The researcher identified central ideas from the text segments that could be condensed and pooled in each coding label (Creswell, 2012). Once the researcher finalized the data analysis, to ensure accuracy, the participants reviewed all transcripts of the interviews, survey responses were compared through the use of the table, and documentation was reviewed.

Researcher's Role

This researcher's goal was to conduct a case study pertaining to principal behaviors and their effects on school climate and student achievement. Participants were interviewed to gain insight to their perceptions of school climate and how it affects student achievement, in alignment with qualitative research. Prior to any contact being made with the participants, an approval from Kennesaw State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. Once approval had been obtained and specific schools had been determined through the correlation analysis, the researcher began seeking participants from these schools. The researcher did not include his school in the list of schools for the study. Glense (2011) explained that researchers may have complications of strained relationships, inability to separate personal relationship and the relationship of participant/researcher, and possible data skewing when conducting research in their own environment.

Trustworthiness and Quality

To distance themselves from the positive paradigm, many naturalistic investigators have opted to use different terminology for *reliability* and *validity* (Shenton, 2004). For this study, this researcher utilized the terms *trustworthiness* and *quality*. Shenton (2004) described four criteria

that researchers should closely follow when addressing trustworthiness in their study. The criteria that ensure the trustworthiness of a study are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004).

Shenton (2004) explained that to achieve credibility, the study should be an accurate measure of what is being stated by the researcher. Additionally, triangulation of data should occur. Triangulation strengthens a study by merging methods or data to measure an outcome (Patton, 2002).

Triangulation can be achieved not only by ensuring there are multiple forms of data included within the study but also by ensuring there is a large selection of participants as well. Utilizing a variety of participants will provide various aspects of principal behaviors that can be compared to others. As an employee of the district and being familiar with the policies and procedures, diligence about remaining unbiased was of the utmost concern during this research process. Being familiar with these policies and protocols helped to ensure the requirements of credibility were met. Additionally, the researcher achieved triangulation through the use of interview protocols, survey results, CCRPI scores, climate ratings, and data analysis. Using all of these data sources enabled the researcher to build a coherent justification for the themes and subthemes that emerged from the principal interviews.

As described by Merriam (2009), *transferability* refers to the participants and setting of the study, along with ensuring the reader has clear details of the description of findings. By including documents of support as well as direct quotes, the researcher better ensured that a detailed description was provided to the reader. To further promote transferability, the researcher ensured maximum variation was utilized throughout the study. “Maximum variation in the sample, whether it be the sites selected for a study or the participants interviewed, allows for the

possibility of a greater range of application by readers of the research" (Merriam, 2009, p. 227). While all of these efforts are important, the reader determines transferability in the end.

Shenton (2004) explained *dependability* as the ability to repeat the same study, with the same participants, the same context, and the same methods while attaining similar results. The study has been written in a manner that would allow another researcher to follow the same path and achieve similar findings if they were to conduct the same research. My intention was to include a richly detailed description of the research process, including all aspects of the study, to ensure that future researchers will be able to utilize this study as a framework to conducting further research on school climate and student achievement.

Confirmability is the final criterion of trustworthiness. Shenton (2004) explained *confirmability* as the work being void of biases of the researcher. By not wavering from the data generated from the surveys, interviews, or documents, the researcher remained objective throughout the study, thus achieving greater confirmability. In an effort to eliminate any predetermined conclusions as to what the outcome of the study would be, the researcher examined their biases and bracketed them to ensure their findings would only be directed by the data that the researcher collected.

To ensure the findings are valid, the researcher employed member checking, triangulation, as well as an external audit. "Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, you need to make sure that your findings and interpretations are accurate" (Creswell, 2012, p. 259). In an effort to achieve triangulation, multiple forms of data collection were utilized. Additionally, once all interviews had been transcribed and analyzed, the researcher asked each participant to read over the transcription of the interview as well as the findings to ensure the analysis was accurate. Furthermore, the researcher employed an external audit consisting of peer researchers to review the study and provide feedback pertaining to the

strengths and areas for improvement. The peer researchers include a Kennesaw State University professor who is well versed in qualitative research as well as the director of assessment for Cherokee County. The names of all participants, as well as the schools in which they are employed, have been omitted to protect their confidentiality. Additionally, each peer reviewer was required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Summary

To determine the effects of principal behaviors on school climate and achievement, the research topic was driven by a qualitative method. The qualitative data was used to further support the findings through the use of a case study approach. The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a clear understanding of principal behaviors in high achieving/high climate elementary schools and the impact of these behaviors on principal professional learning practices. This study also examined if there are discernable behaviors and practices exhibited by principals in high achieving, high climate schools that can be utilized to guide and inform professional development for principals across the school district.

This chapter described the research design, population and sample, instruments utilized, data collection and analysis, and possible challenges of the study. The researcher explored the relationship between school climate and grades 3-5 Milestones Assessment data in one northern Georgia school system in this study. Awareness was achieved from this sample population through the data collection using surveys, interviews, and documents, as well as statistical data supplied from a plethora of survey results. At the conclusion of this study, the researcher will disseminate the concluded findings with stakeholders, research participants, and the local school board. The researcher will continue to be cognizant to uphold the ethical standards set forth by Kennesaw State University's IRB. Upon completion, the researcher will share findings and how research questions were answered, personal reflections regarding the data, personal views in

comparison to the literature, limitations of the study, and possible suggestions for future research (Creswell, 2012). Findings will be shared with the participants and the school district in which the study took place, once the study has been completed and accepted. Based on the research findings, it is this researcher's plan to share with the stakeholders of the school district, as well as the participants involved, what made the high achieving school(s) with a positive climate successful. It is the hope of the researcher that other schools throughout the district could emulate the environment of these schools as well as their strategies to become successful.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to gain a clear understanding of principal behaviors in high achieving/high climate elementary schools in one northern Georgia school district and the impact of these behaviors on future principal professional learning practices. The study was conducted using the methods described in Chapter 3 as a case study.

This chapter presents the results of the study gathered through interviews and is organized into three main sections: summary of participants, findings by theme, and summary. A total of eight elementary school principals were interviewed within one northern Georgia school district. The interview protocol provided background information for each respondent as well as provided data for this study. As an acknowledgment of their willingness to participate in this study, all participants signed an informed consent form prior to being interviewed (Appendix G).

Summary of Participants

Results for my case study were compiled during eight interviews. The selection of candidates was based upon the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) of the school and the Climate Star Rating Scale for each school. Principals interviewed within one northern Georgia school district were leaders in schools with the highest overall CCRPI score with at least a four-star Climate Star Rating. While a total of eight interviews were conducted, by the sixth interview, the findings of the research had been established, as no new information was being presented. Creswell (2011) explained that when regarding sample size within qualitative research, it is common “to study a few individuals or a few cases” (p. 209).

The interview protocol began with introduction questions about each respondent that provided context for the respondents within the case study. Respondents included seven females

and one male ranging in age from 35 to 64. Six of the eight respondents hold a specialist degree in educational leadership, one holds a master's degree in educational leadership, and one holds a doctorate in educational leadership. Leadership experience for all eight respondents ranges from 7 to 16 years; this includes both assistant principal and principal positions. The range of time served as a principal for all respondents is from 3 to 13 years, and all principals have been at their current school for a minimum of three years. Figure 3 provides a clear picture of the demographics of the principals interviewed during this study.

Table 2. *Principal Demographics*

	Mrs. Smith	Mrs. Miller	Mrs. Allen	Mrs. Wilson	Mrs. Davis	Mr. Jones	Mrs. Keller	Dr. Williams
Age Range	55–64	55–64	35–44	45–54	35–44	45–54	45–54	45–54
Sex	F	F	F	F	F	M	F	F
Race	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
Level of Degree	Specialist	Specialist	Specialist	Specialist	Specialist	Master's	Specialist	Doctorate
Years as AP	7	8	3	5	10	3	9	10
Years as Principal	7	8	4	10	3	13	4	3
Years at Current School	3	8	4	4	3	4	4	3

Emerging Themes

Throughout the interview process, three major themes emerged. Subthemes also became evident and helped further disaggregate the findings. ***Theme 1*** *focused on data*. This theme encompassed two subthemes; the Response to Intervention (RTI) process, as well as Formative Instructional Practices (FIP). Response to Intervention and Formative Instructional Practices

were directly addressed in some interviews, while coming out in other interviews during conversations when discussing elementary instructional programs and reducing the achievement gap. All but one respondent made reference to RTI, and half discussed FIP throughout their interviews. ***Theme 2*** *was the largest and focused on communication.* While no additional subthemes emerged, each respondent discussed the impact of communication on student achievement and school climate and culture. ***Theme 3*** *focused on relationships*, and subthemes of rapport, visibility, and accessibility became apparent during the interviews. Three principals spoke directly of relationships, all but one made reference to the subtheme of rapport, five discussed the importance of visibility throughout the school, and half the principals addressed the need to be accessible to school stakeholders.

Findings by Theme

This narrative provides the reader with accurate insight of the participants' perceptions of school climate and student achievement within their school.

The following represent the codes derived from the interviews:

- Themes:
    - DA Data
    - CO Communication
    - RE Relationships
- Subthemes:
    - RTI Response to Intervention
    - FIP Formative Instructional Practices
    - RA Rapport
    - VI Visibility
    - AC Accessibility

Theme 1: Data

The discussion of student achievement lead principals to talk about the importance of data and how it drives decision-making. Additionally, principals expressed the need for further training for teachers and administrators to be able to disaggregate and utilize data in the process of increasing student achievement. Mrs. Miller noted:

> If we are going to truly have an impact on student achievement, we must first understand how well our students are, or are not performing. What are their areas of strength that we can build upon? What are their weakness that we have to address? The only way that you get these answers is to start by taking a close look at student data (K. Miller, personal interview, August 18, 2017).

Mr. Jones gave a rich account of the importance of using data to drive decisions:

> Every decision that we make within a school that focuses on student achievement must start with the data. Data is so much more than standardized test scores. Data is all around us in the classroom. Formal and informal assessments alike can give you sound data as a teacher and we have to understand how to mine that data and use it to better our students' performance. By disaggregating this data, we begin to see subtle clues that might not stand out. Asking open-ended questions to see who is attaining the information and making a record of who responds and who does not respond can provide a teacher with great information. Things like asking the students to answer a culminating question as a ticket out the door is a very powerful tool for a teacher to determine how well her students are understanding the material and what areas she may need to further provide instruction. Couple these informal kind of things with benchmark assessments and you have the

> makings of powerful information to guide instruction. (D. Jones, personal Interview, August 29, 2017)

Mr. Jones went on to say, "We need to do a better job of teaching our teachers how to gather, analyze, understand, and utilize data." Three principals had similar comments regarding data and expressed the importance of becoming more knowledgeable about the importance of administrators and teachers alike understanding not only how to effectively utilize data but also the role data plays in student achievement. Mrs. Smith explained:

> If we are truly going to impact student achievement, we should be a data-driven school system with data-driven schools. Looking at it, breaking it down, dissecting it, and coming up with our weaknesses. We have to drill down into each domain and find out what our weakest links are, and what we need to do to improve each area. This takes teaching and practice as this is not always an innate skill. Teachers, and administrators for that matter, receive little training on how to really understand and use data. It has been a baptism by fire for a long time. (J. Smith, personal interview, August 31, 2017)

Additionally, all principals agreed that data is an integral component of reducing the achievement gap. As the principals spoke of the importance of data in regards to student achievement and reducing the achievement gap, two subthemes emerged: the RTI process and Formative Instructional Practices. The RTI process was addressed by every respondent, while FIP were addressed by most, but not all respondents.

RTI Process

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tier approach that aids in early identification and support of students with learning and behavioral needs (RTI Action Network, n.d.). When a student displays struggles with academics or behavior, a teacher has tools that she can use to

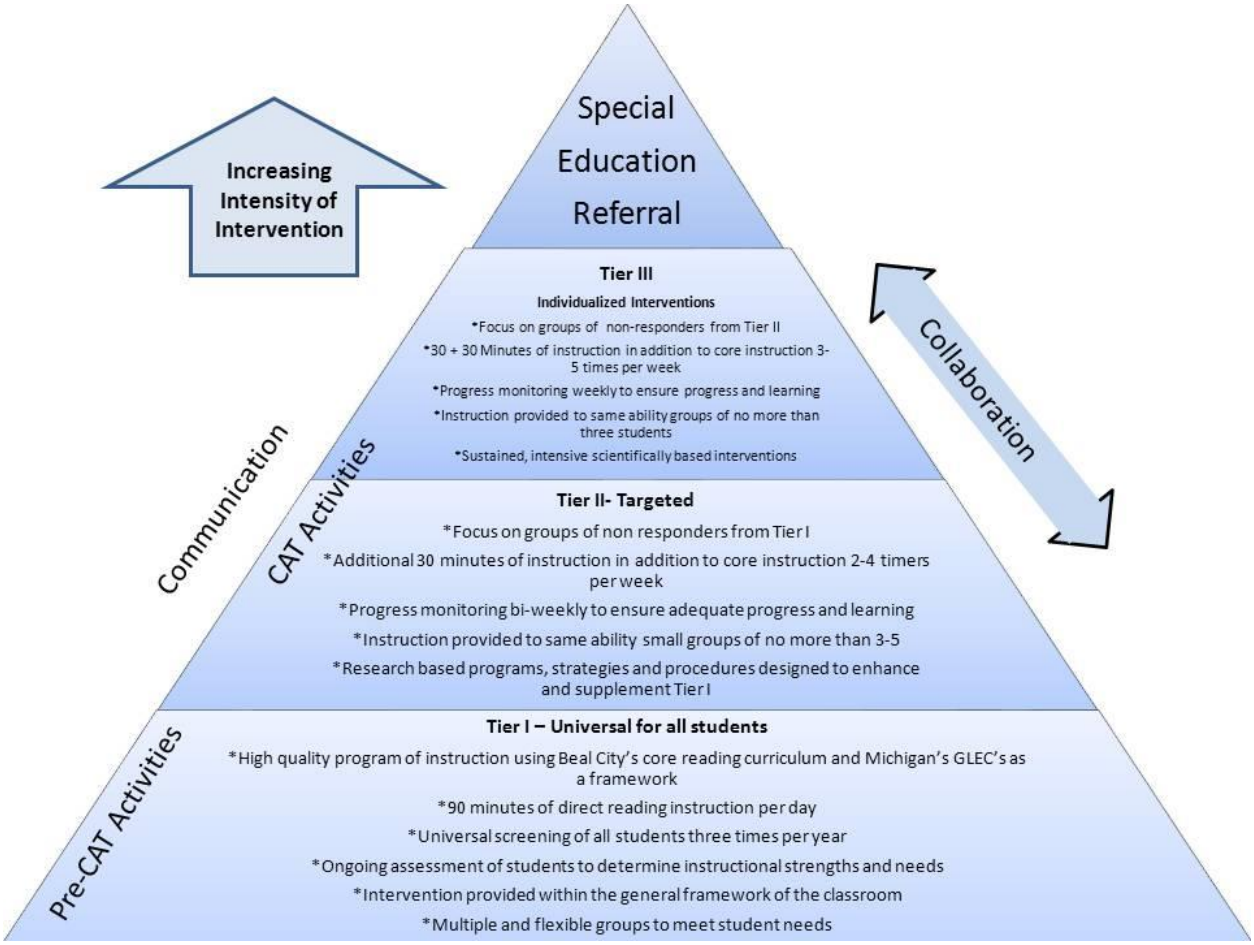
further support the student through the RTI process. The RTI process is comprised of three tiers that have varying levels of support.

Tier 1: High-Quality Classroom Instruction, Screening, and Group Interventions. This is the most basic level of support, and all students in the school are considered to be in this tier. All students receive high-quality instruction and are screened periodically to establish academic baselines. Through the screenings in tier 1, students who are identified "at risk" based upon universal screenings or statewide or districtwide tests receive supplemental instruction in the classroom setting for a period not to exceed eight weeks. At the end of this period, if the student does not show significant progress, they are moved to tier 2 (RTI Action Network, n.d.).

Tier 2: Targeted Interventions. Students in tier 2 are provided increasingly intensive instruction based upon their specific needs and levels of performance. Small-group settings are utilized to provide services and interventions in addition to the general curriculum. Data on the student's progress is recorded for a greater length of time than tier 1, but should typically not exceed a grading period. If the student is not showing adequate progress throughout this period of time, more intensive interventions may be required through tier 3 (RTI Action Network, n.d.).

Tier 3: Intensive Interventions and Comprehensive Evaluation. While in tier 3, students receive intensive individualized interventions that target their specific skill deficits. Students who do not achieve the desired level of progress in response to the interventions are referred for a comprehensive evaluation and are considered eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) (RTI Action Network, n.d.). Figure 10 shows the three tiers of RTI and the level of interventions for each tier.

Figure 10. *Levels of RTI Tiers*



When discussing the RTI process, many principals spoke of how invaluable RTI is in closing the achievement gap. Principals discussed best practices that are utilized within the RTI process, interventions for specific needs, and strategies to support student growth. To illustrate this, Mrs. Allen stated:

> We must use research-based best practices with an effect size that is research-based and shows that the practice or strategy implemented actually shows results. Too often, we use things just because we like them or we believe personally that they work, but things that we do with kids have to be research-based if we are looking to close the achievement gap. The RTI process provides interventions that are research-based. By providing research-based interventions with higher effect

> size for a student based on their data, and based on their individual needs, we can get greater results. (W. Allen, personal interview, August 23, 2017)

This commentary was echoed by all but one principal interviewed, with Mrs. Wilson expressing the goal of the RTI process. She stated:

> Through the RTI process, we identify strategies that we can work on to help that child grow and hopefully work themselves out of the struggle that they are having as opposed to working themselves into more issues that would be working up into higher tiers of the process. We want them to work down to tier one as opposed to up to tier four. (P. Wilson, personal interview, September 5, 2017)

Various principals spoke of the process of RTI and explained that teachers are required to collect data on the implemented interventions to determine the success of the intervention. Comments about how the process is tailored to the needs of the individual students arose in several interviews. For example, Mrs. Keller discussed this concept and explained, "I expect teachers to try multiple strategies when supporting students in the RTI process because a cookie cutter approach just won't work anymore." Mrs. Davis stated,

> The RTI process is invaluable to supporting students. By gathering data from benchmarks and previous test scores, we are able to work with the teacher and parent on tier 1 interventions. If we do not see the necessary progress, we move through the tier process until improvement is noted. (C. Davis, personal interview, September 1, 2017)

Mrs. Miller concurred with the support that the RTI process provides when she stated that

> The RTI process is such a strong way to support students who are struggling. Because teachers have interventions at their fingertips that they can use to support student learning, teachers do not feel helpless in reaching the child. Without these interventions, teachers would be left to their own devices to figure out how to help some of these

struggling learners . (K. Miller, personal interview, August 18, 2017)

The RTI process is very prevalent in this northern Georgia school district, and Dr. Williams confirmed this by stating,

> I think RTI is a very important process. I think the district has moved to really emphasizing what interventions we utilize for students so that we can close our achievement gap, so I would say RTI is probably one of the biggest programs and interventions I could recommend for children. (L. Williams, personal interview, August 28, 2017)

Williams continued, “When a child is struggling, the best practices often come through these interventions.” In a similar vein, Mrs. Davis stated that

> The RTI process is one of the greatest tools we have when working to close the achievement gap. Because we can provide interventions specific to the student’s need, we can reach the child at their learning level while helping to ensure they are making gains towards the grade-level standards. (C. Davis, personal interview, September 1, 2017)

Mr. Jones expressed the importance of the RTI process in closing the achievement gap by stating:

> Closing the achievement gap is a constant concern for a principal. Identifying which groups of students are falling behind is only one portion of the process. We then have to drill down to find individual students who are in greater need of support. Once those students are identified, we can begin properly supporting them through the RTI process. By determining the individual needs of students in these lower performing groups, we can truly begin to make progress. As the individual student within these groups begin to make gains, theoretically, the

> group as a whole will make gains. Ultimately, we should see a smaller margin in these gaps. (D. Jones, personal interview, August 29, 2017)

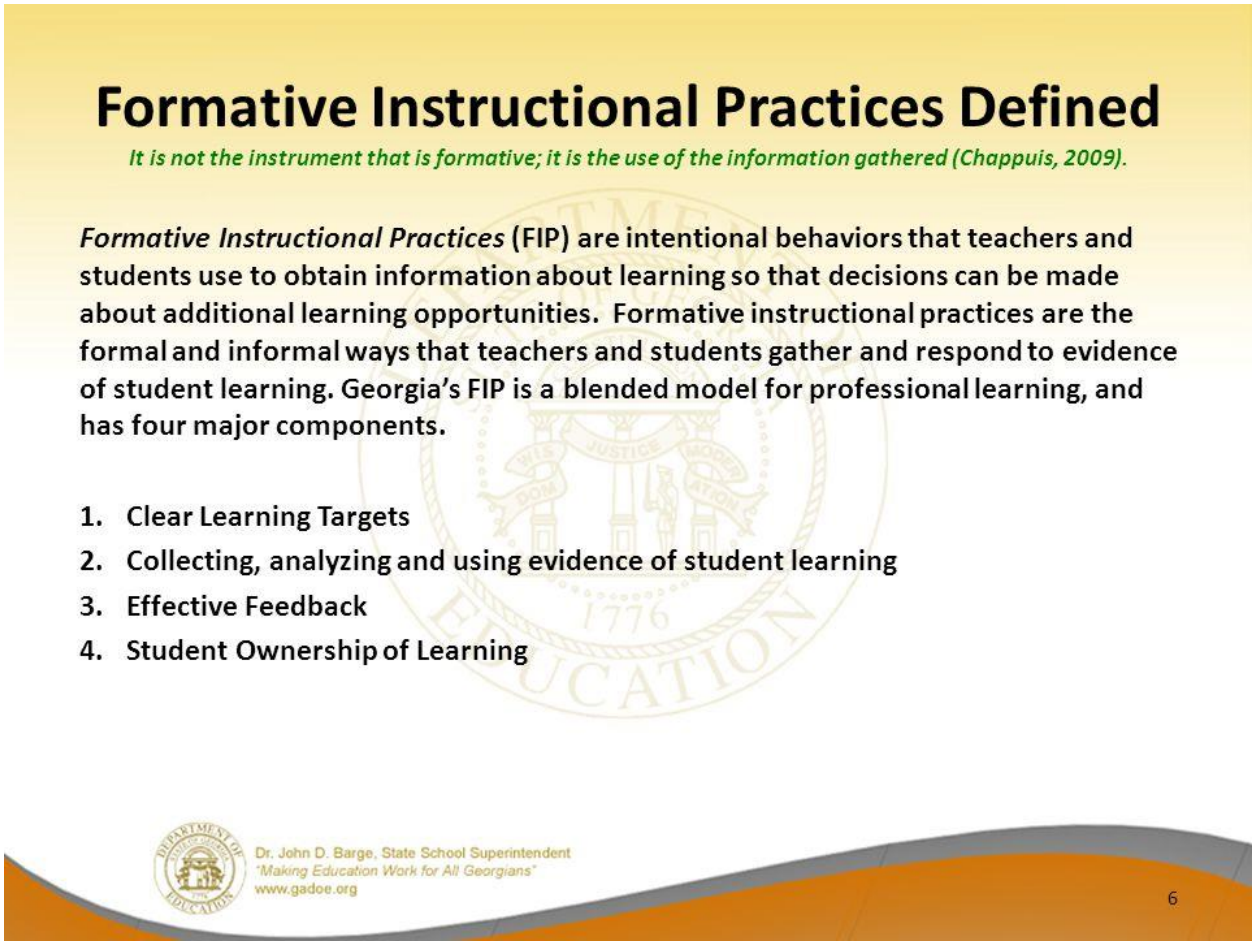
Formative Instructional Practices

Formative Instructional Practices (FIP) are formal and informal strategies that teachers can employ allowing both the teacher and the student the opportunity to determine what the student knows, identify gaps in learning, and modify instruction to meet the student's needs (Battelle for Kids, n.d.). In the state of Georgia, FIP utilizes both face-to-face and online learning opportunities for educators (Georgia FIP, n.d.). According to the Georgia FIP (n.d.) the four major components of FIP are as follows:

1. Clear learning targets
2. Collecting, analyzing, and using evidence of student learning
3. Effective feedback
4. Student ownership of learning

The learning targets give purpose to their learning and allow students to understand not only what they are learning but also the importance of the information they are learning. With clear learning targets, students can answer the question, "Where am I going?" (Georgia DOE, n.d.). By collecting, analyzing, and using evidence of student learning, teachers and students have real-world examples of how the student is performing. The student can use this information to answer the question, "Where am I now?" (Georgia DOE, n.d.). When the teacher provides rich, meaningful feedback, the student is able to determine the answer to the question, "Am I on the right path?" (Georgia DOE, n.d.). Through these best practices, the student has the opportunity to take ownership of his or her own learning and can ask the question, "What do I need to do to be successful?" (Georgia DOE, n.d.). Figure 11 defines FIP and provides the four major components.

Figure 11. *FIP Definition and Four Components*



(Georgia DOE, n.d.)

Throughout the conversations regarding student achievement, FIP emerged during several of the interviews. It was noted that FIP utilizes research-based strategies, gives meaning to the learning for students, provides feedback for students, and helps students take ownership of their learning. An example of these remarks came from Mr. Jones:

> We have to make sure that we have sound programming. This day and age we have to have teachers that can support that instructional climate with strong researched based strategies. Utilizing formative instructional practices help ensure this occurs. By making sure there is meaning and purpose for lesson, collecting data, providing the kids with feedback that makes sense to them as to what they

> are doing well and what they still need to improve upon are great ways that we can help the students take ownership of their own learning. Once this occurs, you are well on your way to seeing increased student achievement. (D. Jones, personal interview, August 29, 2017)

Two principals mentioned that they have conducted faculty-wide professional development on Formative Instructional Practices to help ensure that their teachers are utilizing these practices with consistency and fidelity. Mrs. Smith attributes her schools' 3.4-point increase in the area of "Closing the Achievement Gap" on the CCRPI to formative instructional practices. Mrs. Smith stated:

> Teachers want to see children succeed and it is our job to ensure they have the proper tools to and supports. We looked closely at our data and knew that we had to make some improvements in what we were doing to close the achievement gap.

She further recounted that after receiving "just a little more than half the available points in this area," she realized that the teachers who had become proficient in Formative Instructional Practices had scores that showed the process was working.

She continued that it was at that point that

> we decided that everyone would receive increased formal training on FIP and the expectation would be that we would see much more consistency with these practices across all curricular areas in every grade level. We held regular weekly training sessions during their planning periods and our faculty meetings were often geared towards PD [professional development] around FIP. On a 10-point scale, going from a 5.8 to a 9.2 in a year's time is a really big deal, and we were elated to see these gains. (J. Smith, personal interview, August 31, 2017)

Mr. Jones, the other principal who conducted school wide professional development on FIP for the faculty, saw an increase in "Closing the Achievement Gap" points as well. While the gains were not as dramatic at Mr. Jones's school as they were at Mrs. Smith's school, Mr. Jones credits school wide implementation of FIP for the gains. The principal noted:

> We made an increase of 17% in closing the achievement gap at our school and I truly believe it is because we utilized FIP with fidelity. When students have a better understanding of the value of what is being taught, when it has real-world associations, the learning then has purpose. Additionally, by giving honest feedback to the students, they begin to personally see what they do well and what they need to continue to work on. Without doubt, this increases the students own personal desire to improve. They really start taking ownership of their learning. That is a great thing to see, because aren't we trying to develop life-long learners? (D. Jones, personal interview, August 29, 2017)

As conversations about student achievement with impetus on closing the achievement gap occurred, FIP continued to be a part of the discussion. Mrs. Miller discussed the importance of enhancing rigor as well as teaching children to be problem-solvers and expressed how FIP supports this development. Mrs. Miller stated:

> Depth of knowledge, understanding Bloom's taxonomy are so critical to what we are doing right now, especially with the advent of Milestones testing and trying to get kids to actually be able to formulate answers that are not just regurgitation but actually thought provoking and going in and finding information in the text that they are reading. You know, forming their own opinions and solving problems. FIP helps develop all of these things for students and provides feedback on their

> success. As the students become problem solvers, they start owning their learning. (K, Miller, personal interview, August 18, 2017)

Mrs. Miller continued that, "because of the practices that are involved with formative instruction, problem solving is enhanced. This is probably one of the most critical things, because I think it brings out the whole critical thinking piece in our kids that are really going to be that college and career ready person."

Dr. Williams discussed formative instruction by stating:

> We are doing more and more with making sure that we are using formative instruction and that we are using formative instruction in the correct way. We don't give grades as a "gotcha," per say, but we use this information as a way to know where our children are so we can take that and know what gaps we need to go and fill. (L. Williams, personal interview, August 28, 2017)

Theme 2: Communication

According to Hackman and Johnson (2013), "a person's communication cannot be viewed separately from the person. Communication is more than a set of behaviors; it is the primary, defining characteristic of a human being. Our view of self and others is shaped, defined, and maintained through communication" (p. 10). Based upon this description of communication, the importance of communication in an educational setting is paramount, as an untold number of communications take place within a school on a daily basis. The significance of communication was discussed in regards to student achievement and school culture and climate.

Student Achievement. Administrators communicate instructional expectations for teachers to close the achievement gap. Teachers subsequently communicate instructional expectations and goals for their students. When discussing closing the achievement gap, several principals expressed the role communication plays in student achievement. The data revealed

that principals have to be able to communicate honestly with teachers, express clear expectations, and at the same time provide support. For example, Mrs. Allen explained the importance of communication with teachers and the effects of communication on student achievement.

> Closing the achievement gap is a multi-faceted task. It is not simply looking at data. Don't get me wrong, data is a huge component, but it is not the only component. We have to have honest conversations about what we are seeing and what we have to do to fix it. Administrators have to be clear with expectations and setting the tone for the instructional landscape. Teachers have to be willing to see where they are falling short and express where they need more support. (W. Allen, personal interview, August 23, 2017)

She further reiterated:

> It is not always easy to achieve because we are dealing with people, feelings, and egos. Additionally, we are not specifically trained on these dealings. We kind of learn them through our experiences and overtime, we become more comfortable in having tough conversation. But, when effective, non-threatening communications occur, then we can start to make a difference for our students. (W. Allen, personal interview, August 23, 2017)

> Mrs. Wilson commented that she began to see gains in her overall student achievement when she really "honed" in on how well she was communicating. She noted that as she improved her methods of providing feedback as part of the development process of teachers, the teachers responded very positively. Mrs. Miller simply said, "You have to convey your expectations clearly and provide feedback to your teachers with regularity if you expect to see change."

(P. Wilson, personal interview, September 5, 2017)

Two principals mentioned conversations they had with teachers about student achievement, and Mrs. Keller explained that because of this conversation, she had an "epiphany." She described the conversation by saying:

> What really made me aware of how important communication is to student achievement was a particular conversation that I was having with a teacher whose students were not performing as well as I thought they should. I was still fairly new to the principalship, so I guess I was still figuring things out myself. When she and I were discussing the progress of her students, she clearly said, "I don't know what it is you are looking for." Those words hit home with me and I realized that I was not supporting this teacher as effectively as she deserved. If I was unclear in my expectations, how on earth could she deliver? Since that day, I have worked diligently to improve my communication skills in all facets as a principal. (A. Keller, personal interview, September 7, 2017)

Three different principals mentioned the influence their communications have on the way teachers communicate with their students. For example, Mrs. Davis noted:

> I provide my teachers with timely, meaningful feedback every chance I can. Even just visiting a classroom for a non-evaluatory visit, I carry a small notepad so that I can provide communication about what I was seeing. Most of the time the messages are meant to "pick-me-ups" or "atta-boys," but sometimes I leave a more detailed note about engagement or classroom management. By doing this with frequency, teachers understand what I mean when I say that I expect them to provide students, and parents for that matter, with timely meaningful feedback. This is such an important element in helping students be successful, that I know

> that I have to model it for my teachers. (C. Davis, personal interview, September 1, 2017)

All administrators interviewed agreed that communication is instrumental in closing the achievement gap. Part of communication is principals expressing their high expectations for teachers and in turn, teachers expressing their high expectations for students.

Climate and Culture. When discussing the climate and culture of a school, every principal interviewed referenced the importance of communication in building a positive climate and culture. Based on information in the National School Climate Center (2017), school climate is based upon individual experiences of school life. When considering this, it is understandable that communications play a key role in these experiences. Communications are a part of these interactions within the school. When describing how to build a positive climate, Mrs. Smith stated:

> Communication, communication, communication. More than anything, I think teachers, parents, and even kids just want to know you are hearing them and understanding their needs. Even if you do not have the perfect answer or solution, if they know you are listening, they know you care. Then you have to follow through. If you are going to tell them you are going to do something, make sure you have follow through on things. (J. Smith, personal interview, August 31, 2017)

Smith continued by emphasizing the importance of using communication to address parental or teacher concerns and insuring that issues were resolved. Moreover, she suggested the principal should “take an opportunity to reach back out to them and check

in with them to make sure they are still feeling good about things.. (J. Smith, personal interview, August 31, 2017)

Mr. Jones articulated the importance of using communication to build a sense of community in the school. By communicating positive things about the school and informing stakeholders of events that are taking place, Mr. Jones expressed that a feeling of belonging can be achieved:

> Communication is key. In order to build a strong school climate, you have to ensure that everyone feels involved in the school. To help make this happen, I do weekly communications for our parents through a Facebook video every Friday. This lets them know what has gone on throughout the week and what is coming up for the following week for our school as a whole and I have gotten some really good, positive feedback from our parents about these videos. Additionally, I send regular e-mails to our faculty and staff and I send Aspen Blast to all parents regarding upcoming events or important situations pertaining to the school. (D. Jones, personal interview, August 29, 2017)

He also emphasized that working with and communicating with partners was a valuable aspect of communication when he stated that

> I work diligently to invite Partners in Education, parents, and of course teachers to school events. I encourage our partners to participate in judging contest, participating in career days, and setting up booths at our carnivals. So, we ask them to be present as much as possible to really get them involved in our school community. Additionally, I try to share positives as often as I can. I feel that celebrating success are very important communications that make people feel

> good about what we are doing to help their children succeed. (D. Jones, personal interview, August 29, 2017)

Mr. Jones went on to state, “We really try to focus on the positives and share this not just with our teachers, but with our community as a whole.”

Dr. Williams expressed her understanding of the importance of communication by stating:

> If you want a positive school climate, you have to be an effective communicator. At the beginning of the year, we send out a survey to find out what is the best way to communicate with parents. We use multiple means of communication because not everyone has computers, but most parents do have phones. So, in addition to e-mails, we use text messages and social media to communicate. Also, with communication, I try to make sure that I not only communicate when a child has done something wrong, but when I want to send kudos about something great their child has done. (L. Williams, personal interview, August 28, 2017)

Ms. Williams emphasized the importance of ensuring that teachers are aware of what goes on in the district and the importance of the principal giving the teachers

> Ample time to plan for changes to their schedule because of assemblies or other school events, it reduces their stress level versus telling them the day before. People like to be able to plan and when their plans are changed for them unexpectedly, it can be upsetting. Communication plays a big role in the school climate all the way around. (L. Williams, personal interview, August 28, 2017)

Mrs. Miller described her efforts to work with teachers to build a positive school climate by saying:

> With teachers, I try hard every year to make them feel important. I really want to encourage them as much as possible because we can get bogged down in our daily jobs and it is something that I think everybody needs to hear when they are doing something well. That goes a really long way when you are trudging along and you are just trying to keep your head above water. Sometimes just that "atta-girl" or "atta-boy" message can really make things better. (K, Miller, personal interview, August 18, 2017)

She also discussed the importance of open lines of communications with parents when she stated:

> I try to keep a very open line of communication at my school. We do several things like newsletters twice a month, social media posts, and Parent-Principal Partnership meetings. I host these meetings four times a year. I invite parents in and have a list of topics that are chosen ahead of time that affect our school and community. I ensure these meeting dates are posted on social media so we can get as many parents into the meetings as possible. (K, Miller, personal interview, August 18, 2017)

Theme 3: Relationships

During the interviews, principals discussed the importance that building positive relationships has on a school's climate and culture. By building positive relationships and interactions with all stakeholders, buy-in from staff, and an increased sense of trust in the school are enhanced. Mrs. Wilson also discussed the way that she tried to use relationships to build a family-like culture in her building:

> We try to show that a positive climate and culture is being modeled from the top down. I want people to walk into the building and be like "I go to school to teach,

> but I feel like I am a part of a family." And that is truly how we are and it has worked for us. (P. Wilson, personal interview, September 5, 2017)

She continued by emphasizing the importance of honest conversation to build relationships.

> If we have issues, we just sit down and have some honest conversations. Even with students, parents, whatever; we just talk it out. If a parent comes in upset, I'll just say, "If you take a deep breath, we'll get to the bottom of this, I promise you, but we have to be able to talk it through or we are not going to get anywhere." I think that has really become our motto. It is really good and has just enveloped in our whole being. It is really who we are. You really see that when you are in the school. (P. Wilson, personal interview, September 5, 2017)

Mrs. Allen affirmed the importance of relationship building by stating:

> You know, it is really interesting that in order to truly have a great culture in your school, you have to build solid relationships. This is not something that we are trained to do, you aren't taught this in graduate school and we don't have professionally development on relationship building, but it is paramount to being successful. These relationships are the fabric that all other things come from. (W. Allen, personal interview, August 23, 2017)

Another key point related to building relationships is building trust. Ms. Allen expressed the ways that building trust can help in communicating with teachers when she expressed this point:

> When you have to give a directive to teachers, they will respond better if they know you care- if they trust you. The same goes for parents and students. When

> they believe that you have their best interest at heart, they buy in to what you are trying to accomplish. (W. Allen, personal interview, August 23, 2017)

Mr. Jones spoke of the role that relationship building plays within his school by stating:

> In order for there to be a positive culture, and climate for that matter, within a school, you really have to earn people's trust. The way you do that is by getting to know them, by talking to them and building a good working relationship with them. This goes for all stakeholders; teachers, parents, students, and community members. You build these relationships by being seen and being approachable. That is the first step for developing strong relationships. (D. Jones, personal interview, August 29, 2017)

One of the most important aspects of using communication to build relationships is to have honest conversations with teachers and parents alike. Ultimately, principals emphasized that relationships undergirded the fabric of the school. Additionally, rapport, visibility, and accessibility emerged as subthemes under relationships.

Rapport. By developing strong rapport with all stakeholders, the principal can begin to develop meaningful relationships with teachers, students, and community members alike. Throughout the interviews, principals spoke of rapport and explained that through rapport, trust is established, a sense of belonging is developed, and a sense of understanding is garnered. However, various principals spoke of the lack of specific training in the skill of developing rapport. For example, Mr. Jones said that there is not specific training for building rapport while discussing its importance. He stated:

> Not everyone understands the importance of building rapport. This is not something that you are taught in college, and principals do not receive PD

> [Professional Development] on increasing these skills. Interpersonal relationship skills are things that you sometimes have to work on. They are things that you have to learn and understand, because until people feel like they can trust you, it will be difficult to establish a good working relationship. For many of our families, there is a communication barrier, due to language, and this makes it difficult for them to feel like a part of the school family. (D. Jones, personal interview, August 29, 2017)

In addition, he commented:

> To build trust and to help these families realize they are welcomed, we host an ESOL dinner. We do a potluck supper and have several different translators in attendance to help ensure communications are the best possible. We offer numerous books for our families to take home and we continue to encourage them to support the school and their children. This event goes a long way in building rapport with our community. (D. Jones, personal interview, August 29, 2017)

Two principals discussed the importance of building rapport with the students and how every child should feel that they trust the adults in the building. For example, Mrs. Davis said:

> One of our goals, and we are truly focused on this, is building a level of trust for our students. We want every child in our building to know that there is at least one adult that they can go to for anything that is bothering them, anything that is on their mind, anything that they think they need support with. They have to have at least one adult in that building that they can count on. (C. Davis, personal interview, September 1, 2017)

She reiterated how all faculty and staff are responsible for building both trust and rapport when she emphasized that

> The homeroom teacher should be the first to establish this type of rapport, but in departmentalized grade-levels, all the teachers can establish this. Additionally, we have auxiliary people like our counselors, specials teachers, paraprofessionals, and even administrators who can step up in these roles as well, but it is critical every kid have a trusted individual in the building. (C. Davis, personal interview, September 1, 2017)

Mrs. Miller explained that everyone should be involved in developing student rapport by saying:

> I think it is important that we build relationships with our students. We don't know what their home life is like and we can't control that. However, we can control what their school life is like. From the time those children get on the bus in the morning until the time they get off in the afternoon, we can have a positive impact for these kids. That school bus driver may make a difference for a child in the rest of his day. (K. Miller, personal interview, August 18, 2017)

She continued:

> If the driver says, "Hmmm, you are here," it could have a negative effect on the child's actions and attitude. But, if the driver says, "Good morning, I am so glad to see you today," that could be the difference in a great day and a terrible day. It is important that, in a school, the teachers are out in their doorway in the mornings, that the administrators are out in the building as the children are coming into school in the morning as this allows us all to greet the children with comments like "Good morning, how are you? I am glad you are here today." This builds a sense of trust and feeling that we truly care for these kids. (K. Miller, personal interview, August 18, 2017)

Two principals highlighted the importance of building rapport with teachers by modeling respectful behavior. The following quote captures Mrs. Keller sentiment regarding rapport.

> We may agree to disagree, but we will sit and listen in a cordial, calm manner. This goes a long way for not only the parent, but for the teachers as well. When you model this behavior for teachers, you get that mutual respect from them. When they know that I have their back, and out on the front line, I do have their back, they trust tend to trust me more. Additionally, teachers know that if I ever do have an issue with them, I take them behind closed doors and it is a private conversation. We can cover a multitude of issues just from that simple act of mutual respect. (A. Keller, personal interview, September 7, 2017)

Dr. Williams reiterated this thought by stating:

> Teachers have to know that we understand what they deal with every single day. So, by supporting them with parents, by supporting them in front of their peers, and just always being verbally and visibly positive and encouraging, and pointing out the good things that they are doing and making suggestions to those who perhaps need to have some improvement on their evaluations goes a long way. Additionally, providing positive feedback and growth statements versus making them feel like they are being critiqued gives the teachers a sense of support, which ultimately builds rapport. (L. Williams, personal interview, August 28, 2017)

Two different principals spoke specifically of the importance of building rapport with district office personnel. Mrs. Wilson stated:

> By being active in the district, volunteering for committees, attending optional training sessions, and working closely with those in the central office, you begin to build rapport. I have asked permission for my school to be involved in piloting

> the reading program instead of waiting to be appointed. By being entrusted to lead this pilot program, I was able to provide data that benefited our district as a whole. During this process, I worked with many district level people that I had not worked with before. This helped me develop new relationships and increase lines of communication within the district. The best way that I have found to build rapport with folks at the district level is to have good honest conversations with them, do what you say you are going to do, and show the results of your work. (P. Wilson, personal interview, September 5, 2017)

Mrs. Smith said:

> Being in this county for such a long time, I know most of these people. I feel like I am always professional and they are always professional. I trust that I can send an e-mail or make a phone call to county office without being judged. A lot of times, I have people call me just to ask a question about something or to get my feedback as a principal. I appreciate that as there is still camaraderie with the county office. (J. Smith, personal interview, August 31, 2017)

As one of the subthemes, participants emphasized that rapport must be developed with all stakeholders in order to create an environment of trust and respect.

Visibility. Being visible to the parents, teachers, and students goes a long way in building relationships. The researcher had been an assistant principal in one school, and three years after they left that school, they were speaking with a woman at a local grocery store. She said, “Didn’t you used to be the principal of Georgia Elementary School?” The researcher replied by stating that they were the assistant principal. She rebutted with, “No, you were the principal.” After the researcher assured her that they were not the principal and were in fact the assistant principal, she stated, “I truly thought you were the principal. I saw

you everywhere from the car-rider line to the cafeteria when I came for lunch to the afterschool program when I came to pick up my daughter. Well, who was the principal then?" This example signifies how important visibility can be and the impact it has on perceptions of the school community. Many of the principals interviewed in this study expressed the importance of visibility and the impact it has on relationships. Mrs. Wilson described her efforts to be highly visible:

> I make a concerted effort to be highly visible in my building. This is important with my teachers because you are doing the work with them. I tell them that we laugh together, we cry together, and we fuss together, but we work together. We very much try to create a sense of community and that we are here as an administrative team to serve the teachers to get the job done that we need to do for these students. (P. Wilson, personal interview, September 5, 2017)

Mrs. Wilson discussed how visibility affects parents as well:

> When parents see you with frequency, they get the sense that you are truly involved in the school, in their children. Simple things like being present at the car-rider line in the mornings, walking through the cafeteria during lunches, or attending PTA functions helps to ensure that you are seen. I think this brings parents a great deal of comfort, as they know you are there and present. While it may seem small, it means a lot to the parents to know who you are and that you care. (P. Wilson, personal interview, September 5, 2017)

When discussing school climate and culture, Mrs. Smith explained how important visibility is to developing relationships by saying:

> It is all about relationships, and I think this especially important being in a Title 1 school. Parents need to know you care. When they see you interacting with their

> children, talking with teachers, and simply being present, they gain trust in you as a leader. Parents, regardless of income or status, want to know that the people working with their children care about them as people. They want to know their kids are safe and loved at school. That is why I make every effort to been seen as much as possible. (J. Smith, personal interview, August 31, 2017)

She furthered this commentary by stating:

> There are plenty of times that I could be locked in my office taking care of paperwork or some task that has a deadline, but I make sure that during times when there will be many parents in or around the building, I am visible to them. (J. Smith, personal interview, August 31, 2017)
>
> Mrs. Keller simply stated, "Visibility is key to building relationships. When parents, teachers, and students see you regularly, they feel comfortable with you and are more likely to address concerns should they arise."
>
> A. Keller, personal interview, September 7, 2017)

On a similar note, Mrs. Allen stated:

> I think being visible is very, very important. Just being visible throughout your building for small talk, conversations, being approachable, and having a great attitude make a huge difference. I think when those elements about yourself [visible, approachable, good attitude] are displayed; it helps create a strong dynamic within the building. To increase visibility with the teachers, I have done away with faculty meetings and everything is done in small groups so we have more time for engagement and discussions. By being able to spend more time with the teachers in small groups I can hear more of their individual voices,

> concerns, and ideas. I think that makes a big difference. (W. Allen, personal interview, August 23, 2017)

Accessibility. While many principals described the importance of visibility, it was clear through the conversations that visibility and accessibility go hand in hand. Parents and teachers alike need the reassurance that a building leader is approachable. They need to know that when they need you, you are there to support them. Mrs. Davis showed the relation between visibility and accessibility by stating, "I think visibility and just seeing that you are available and that you are approachable helps the trust factor." (C. Davis, personal interview, September 1, 2017) This was a powerful statement, as it emphasized the bond that being visible and accessible creates with trust. Parents, teachers, and students need to know that they can trust their school leader, as this has a huge impact on the climate and culture of the school. When people trust their leadership, they feel secure in the decisions being made. When the principal models being accessible and approachable, the teachers are more likely to demonstrate the same characteristics to their students and parents.

As conversations regarding school climate and culture continued, Dr. Williams expressed the importance of accessibility:

> Being visible is important, but it is really only a fraction of the equation. You have to demonstrate that you are accessible and approachable to people. I have worked in schools in this district where the principal failed to demonstrate these qualities with regularity, and it made things difficult. There was not a warm feeling in the school and trust was limited at best. Because I have seen this first hand, I work especially hard to be visible and accessible to our parents and teachers. You know, sometimes you have to engage with them first. (L. Williams, personal interview, August 28, 2017)

She furthered this point when she said:

> By greeting parents with a smile and an introduction, you can break the ice. I always try to ask something like, "How is your child's year going so far?" or "Are you having a great experience at our school?" By putting questions like that out to parents, it opens the door for them to give you good feedback. If they have a concern, this gives them the opportunity for them to share it with you. If things are going well, it gives them an avenue to brag on a teacher or share a special experience. Either way, it lets them be heard and to have a voice within our school. (L. Williams, personal interview, August 28, 2017)

Mrs. Miller described her efforts to be accessible by stating,

> If I am sitting in my office, I hear a parent out there, and I recognize the voice, I will step out and say hello. I really think my parents appreciate that as it lets them know that I am accessible to them.

Mrs. Davis said, "I just want to be accessible; to give parents the opportunity to ask questions and find out information from me in a relaxed environment." (C. Davis, personal interview, September 1, 2017) During the interview, Mrs. Wilson explained:

> While it may seem like common sense, it is surprising how often principals miss out on relationship building. School districts should do a better job of emphasizing, even training administrators on the aspects of relationship building. If you want to develop strong relationships in your building, you have to be accessible. I have an open-door policy for my staff and parents. I feel this helps builds trust and forges relationships. When people know that you are there when they need you, this goes a long way. Additionally, it helps the communication because you show that you are truly open to discussing concerns or hearing ideas

> and suggestions. By ensuring that I am approachable and treat everyone with respect and dignity, I found that people are comfortable in reaching out to me for support. This is so important for our teachers and parents to know the principal is there for them. (P. Wilson, personal interview, September 5, 2017)

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings of this case study. A rich narrative of the participants involved, while ensuring anonymity was maintained, was provided. An explanation of how the interview responses were disaggregated and how the findings were coded was included. The researcher described the emerging themes of their research as well as how that produced additional subthemes. The findings were presented based upon themes and subthemes that emerged during the interview process. A summary of the themes and subthemes is presented in the figure below (see Figure 12).

Each principal interviewed expressed the importance of utilizing data in order to achieve strong academic results. However, it was noted that there is a need for further professional learning opportunities at the university level as well as within the district on how to effectively utilize data to drive instruction. While not every respondent spoke directly of data in general terms, through the subthemes of Response to Intervention and Formative Instructional Practices, all eight respondents discussed the role that data plays in student achievement.

Furthermore, it was determined from the findings that communication plays a vital role in both academic success as well as climate and culture within a school. While the theme of relationships emerged during the interviews, the subthemes of rapport, visibility, and accessibility were fleshed out as well. Moreover, the need for enhanced professional learning opportunities in the areas of communication and relationship building arose from the interviews. Additionally, Table 3 shows each theme and subtheme and where each respondent commented on each of the themes and

subthemes. The final table of this section, Table 4, demonstrates the performance on CCRPI for the schools that were utilized in this study over a three-year period. Furthermore, this table shows the overall CCRPI score for each school as well as their achievement gap points and overall Climate Star Rating.

Figure 12. *Demonstration of Themes*

Table 3. *Responses by Interviewees*

Themes	Data			Communication	Relationships			
Subthemes		RTI	FIP			Rapport (RA)	Visibility (VI)	Accessibility (AC)
Dr. Williams	(RTI) (FIP)	x	x	x	(RA), (VI), (AC)	x	x	x
Mrs. Miller	x	x	x	x	(RA), (AC)	x		x
Mrs. Wilson	(RTI)	x		x	x	x	x	x
Mrs. Allen	(RTI)	x		x	x		x	
Mrs. Keller	(RTI)	x		x	(RA), (VI)	x	x	
Mr. Jones	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Mrs. Smith	x		x	x	(RA), (VI)	x	x	
Mrs. Davis	(RTI)	x		x	(RA), (AC)	x		x

Table 4. *Overall CCRPI Scores, Achievement Gap Points, and Climate Star Rating for Three Years* (Georgia DOE, n.d.)

	2014	2014	2014	2015	2015	2015	2016	2016	2016
	CCRPI	Achievement Gap Points	Climate Star Ratings	CCRPI	Achievement Gap Points	Climate Star Ratings	CCRPI	Achievement Gap Points	Climate Star Ratings
School 1	81.4	10	4	80.3	7.5	4	87.1	8.3	4
School 2	89.5	15	4	87.8	8.3	4	93.1	9.2	4
School 3	70.4	6	4	75	6.7	4	83.1	6.7	4
School 4	87.9	12	3	82.6	7.5	4	88.4	8.3	4
School 5	71.1	5	4	81.3	8.3	4	80	8.3	4
School 6	84.1	11	4	72.1	5	4	81.3	6.7	4
School 7	69.2	6	3	69.1	5.8	4	84.5	9.2	4
School 8	81.4	10	4	80	7.5	4	83.3	7.5	4

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purposes of this study were to determine the effects that principal characteristics and behaviors have on student achievement and school climate and culture as well as if any of these behaviors could lead to greater professional learning for other principals in the district. The study analyzed principal behaviors in high achieving, high climate and culture elementary schools in one northern Georgia school district. The focus of this research was to determine the characteristics of the principals that lead to successful student achievement and school climate and culture. Specifically, the research centered on the leadership skills of principals that obtained high ratings of student achievement and school climate and culture. The research utilized a case study with a phenomenological foundation to identify the specific behaviors that were successful for principals in high achieving, high climate elementary schools, therefore supporting the research question: Are there discernable behaviors that leaders have in common for schools with high climate and culture ratings and high achievement?

Using the theory of System Maintenance and Change, principals must model order, organization, clarity and control, and innovation within their schools. The principals in this study supported and reiterated that order and organization focused on the emphasis of student behavior and the quality and organization of the classroom assignments and planned activities lead to student success. The research findings regarding communication upheld that clarity mandates that rules, expectations, and consequences in a school must be well defined, leaving no doubt.

The literature review highlighted the background of the study as well as previous work around the concepts. There was explicit research pertaining to the impact principals have on the success of their school (Ebmeier, 2003; Holland, 2004) “through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions” (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, &

Hopkins, 2006, p. 5). In the area of student achievement, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) developed 21 leadership responsibilities that correlate to increased levels of student achievement (see Figure 1). Furthermore, Hallinger's model of instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2012; Hallinger, 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 1996) has been used most frequently in the 21st century in researching educational leadership.

In regards to school climate, research shows that when teachers feel supported by their administrators, they report higher levels of commitment and greater collegiality (Sharp, 2009). Research conducted by Brown and Medway (2007) demonstrated greater academic and behavioral outcomes in schools that have open communication, supportive administration, and strong teacher-student relationships. By developing an environment where children feel safe, teachers feel supported, and parents feel welcomed, principals increase the climate and culture of their school (Devine & Cohen, 2007; Vieno, Perkins, Smith, & Santinello, 2005; Shields, 2006).

Context of Findings

This study highlighted the true feelings of principals regarding student achievement and school climate and culture. Throughout the interview process, as principals shared experiences and offered suggestions, it was evident to see the passion that these respondents displayed. Having an open forum for these principals to speak about their work and relate their experiences within their schools allowed these leaders to be reflective and honest about actions that have helped them be successful in improving student achievement and school climate and culture. The ownership to utilize data and develop relationships within their buildings in support of achievement and climate was present in all interviews. The findings presented were categorized by the three themes that emerged during the interviews. The context of these findings were subcategorized as well.

Theme 1: Data

All respondents echoed this theme. Through managing the instructional program, the principal becomes deeply engaged in motivating, supervising, and monitoring teaching and learning in the school (Hallinger, 2012). Each of the principals in this study discussed data and the role it plays in student achievement. Many principals expressed the need to better assist teachers in their abilities to understand, disaggregate, and utilize data to drive instruction. It became evident that more training for administrators and faculty alike would benefit student achievement across the district. Additionally, every respondent commented on the effect the Response to Intervention (RTI) process has on student achievement, particularly in closing the achievement gap.

Furthermore, the RTI process is loaded with data pertaining to student achievement. Because the teachers are required to collect data for a set amount of time for each intervention they are implementing, the teachers can see first-hand, which strategies are and are not successful. Moreover, the needs of each student vary based upon their individual circumstances; therefore, the interventions are tailored to each specific child.

Half the respondents in regards to student achievement also discussed formative Instructional Practices (FIP). FIP training occurred across the district for all teachers during the 2015–2016 school year. However, the principals in schools that showed the greatest gains in overall CCRPI scores and Closing the Achievement Gap points attribute these gains largely in part to the use of FIP with consistency and fidelity. This demonstrates the need for further training of FIP for all teachers and administrators across the district.

Theme 2: Communication

All respondents repeated this theme during conversations and discussed the impacts communication has on both student achievement and climate and culture. The principals who

discussed the effects of communication on student achievement expressed belief that communication of clear and concise instructional expectations for teachers translated into the classroom from teacher to student as well. Two of these same principals discussed their own need for training rather than to "learn [these skills] through our own experiences and overtime" or "figuring things out myself." Based upon respondent commentary, open conversations about what is effective and what needs to change in the way we deliver instruction are vital to increasing student achievement. Nonthreatening, effective dialogue is a needed process to ensure that teachers and administration are clear as to what needs to occur for students academically.

Moreover, in this research, some principals described the effects positive communication has on school climate and culture. They believed that their actions and efforts to communicate effectively translated to how the teachers communicated with their students and parents. Other principals described how strong communications develop a sense of involvement for stakeholders. Knowing what is going on in the building, clearly stating the purpose behind why things are being done, and hearing concerns and ideas lead to a climate of trust (Cohen, Pickeral, & McCloskey, 2009). Respondents discussed the importance of effective communications with parents, teachers, and students alike in developing a strong climate and culture.

A school leader must be an effective communicator if the teachers are going to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them in supporting student learning. The leader must provide feedback as to what the teachers are doing well and what they must improve upon. Furthermore, communications between teacher and student, student and student, administration and teachers, parents and teachers, parents and administrators, and so on take place every day in a school. Based upon these interactions, it is easy to understand why communication was the largest theme that emerged from the interviews conducted in this study and was addressed during every interview.

Theme 3: Relationships

Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, and Higins-D'Alessandero (2013) explained that relationships have a major impact on school climate, and many of the respondents expressed this same sentiment. If a principal expects that positive relationships will occur between teachers and students, the principal must establish and model positive relationships with his faculty and staff (Vieno, Perkins, Smith, & Santinello, 2005). Respondents spoke of the importance that rapport has on developing strong relationships. By developing trust with all stakeholders, a principal gains credibility within the school community. Understanding that everyone wants to feel respected and developing rapport builds mutual trust and respect between the principal and those that he serves. Three of these principals expressed the importance of effective workplace relationships and the need for further training in this area to positively impact school climate and culture.

Relationships are vital to the success of schools' climate and culture. Beyond having an initial sense of feeling welcomed upon entering a school, relationships establish the true culture of the school. When positive working relationships occur among administrators, teachers, colleagues, and parents, the culture of the school becomes positive as well.

One step in building authentic relationships within a school is to be visible to all stakeholders. When a principal is highly visible, people gain a sense of familiarity with him, which brings a level of comfort and ease. Respondents expressed the importance of being seen frequently throughout the building, as this allows the principal to establish relationships and maintain a finger on the pulse of instruction, and provides an opportunity to model caring and respect for students and staff alike.

Additionally, being highly visible increases the perception that the principal is the principal. Respondents stated that being visible increases the likelihood that stakeholders will

approach you when they have a question or concern. Being visible and approachable increases the trust factor for parents and teachers in regards to the building principal (Rieg, 2008). However, many respondents expressed the importance of the principal engaging others as a means of developing approachability. By reaching out to parents or teachers and starting conversations, the principal gives them the opportunity to discuss other points of interest they may want to express. Having an open-door policy forges relationships with the stakeholders of the school. When these relationships are established, stakeholders become increasingly comfortable in reaching out to the principal for support.

In addition, building good rapport with all stakeholders is important to developing strong relationships. When people understand what your intentions are within a school setting, you are open to hearing, and understanding their interest and needs, as a school leader, you are establishing the tone of climate and culture within your building. Developing rapport gives you credibility and helps bring a sense of trust for those you serve and support. It is imperative for principals to develop rapport not only with their teachers but also with parents, community members, and district-level personnel as well.

In summary, building strong relationships through developing rapport, being highly visible, and proving to be approachable are vital aspects of developing a sound culture and climate within a school setting.

Limitations of Findings

The limitations of this research centered on the design of the study and the current index being utilized to measure school ratings. As a novice researcher, the researcher chose a case study with a phenomenological approach. The researcher intended to analyze a smaller group with the intent of using the data gathered to inform the larger group. However, due to principals being selected based upon their student achievement and school climate ratings, the subset had

very little diversity and was comprised predominantly of females. Additionally, all principals in this study were white. Furthermore, with the subset being determined by achievement scores and climate ratings, the selection of principals for this study was not random. However, it was purposeful in design.

In addition to this, the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) has undergone various changes over the past three years in the manner in which weights are given to specific areas of the index. Because of this fact, it is difficult to assess which schools are truly showing an increase in closing the achievement gap as well as the total points earned for each school. Many principals state, “It is like trying to hit a moving target,” when referring to the CCRPI.

Moreover, this qualitative case study used semi-structured interviews, which presented limitations as well. Inasmuch as respondents commented on the themes that had greater relevance to their experiences, some themes received fewer comments with various respondents. As a result, the magnitude of detail, length, and emotion for responses fluctuated.

An additional limitation to the study is that while System Maintenance and Change Theory (Holahan, 2002) supports the study of principal behaviors and characteristics and the effects on student achievement and school climate, limited information exists regarding this theoretical framework.

Implications of Findings

This case study addressed two main research questions related to the intellectual goals of the study: (1) Are there discernable behaviors that leaders have in common for schools with high achievement and high climate and culture ratings? And (2) Can principal practices and behaviors

of high achieving/high climate schools be informative to the field of principal professional learning to enhance positive school climate and culture and student academic performance?

Research question 1: Are there discernable behaviors that leaders have in common for schools with high achievement and high climate and culture ratings? The qualitative data collected from the interviews with principals in high climate and high student achievement schools revealed three themes and five subthemes. The three themes were data, communication, and relationships. The five subthemes were Response to Intervention (RTI), Formative Instructional Practices (FIP), rapport, visibility, and accessibility.

Responses that led to the findings for research question 1 show that principals in high achieving/high climate schools shared many of the same ideals, beliefs, practices, and behaviors. More specifically, each principal discussed the importance of understanding and using data, communicating effectively with school stakeholders, and establishing and nurturing positive relationships with students, teachers, parents, and/or district-level administrators in order to enhance positive school climate and culture and student academic performance. The principals in this study commented that more needs to be done to enhance both teachers' and administrators' ability to effectively utilize data to enhance student achievement as well as providing greater opportunities to increase interpersonal relationship skills.

The literature review revealed the importance of the role that the principal plays in a school. Highly effective principals can reduce student absences and suspension, improve graduation rates, and increase students' scores as much as 10 percentile points on standardized test in just one year (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Also described in the literature review, the principal is the catalyst for everything from quality instruction for the students to creating a safe environment for learning, to developing a climate and culture of trust and a sense of community within the school, and everything in between (Bradshaw, Waasdrop, &

O'Brennan, 2010; Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, & Pollitt, 2013; Hallinger, 2012; Shields, 2006). The principals interviewed gave great insight into strategies that they utilize not only to increase student achievement but also to develop a positive climate for students to learn.

During this case study, the theme of data proved to be extremely important, as it was discussed numerous times regarding student achievement. To be effective instructional leaders, principals must focus on curriculum and instruction. They must oversee the collection, analysis, and use of data to support student learning. Additionally, they must lead teachers, students, and the community to achieve the academic goals set for each student (Usdan, McCloud, & Podmostko, 2000; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Every principal interviewed has strong beliefs that properly employing data reduces the achievement gap and increases overall student achievement. These principals continue to increase student achievement by utilizing research-proven instructional programs and analyzing data to determine areas of success and weakness within their students' academic performance. Researchers discovered that effective principals utilize data to gain the most statistical evidence, learn to "ask useful questions" of the information, display the data to tell, "compelling stories, and use the data to stimulate "collaborative inquiry among teachers" (Portin et al., 2009, p. 52).

In regards to the theme of communication, it was evident that open lines of clear and concise communication are paramount to student success and overall climate and culture of a school. Implications for this theme became apparent through the interview process. The principals interviewed implied that through clear and concise communications and supportive actions, their staff morale increased. Sharp (2009) explained that teachers show greater levels of commitment and higher levels of collegiality when they feel supported by their administration.

When considering the theme of relationships, every principal spoke of the significance that developing strong relationships has on the climate and culture of the school. Fullan (2002) states that

> the single factor common to successful change is that relationships improve. If relationships improve, things get better. If they remain the same or get worse, ground is lost. Thus, leaders must be consummate relationship builders with diverse people and groups—especially with people different than themselves. This is why emotional intelligence is equal to or more important than having the best ideas. In complex times, emotional intelligence is a must. (p. 7)

Additionally, the responses from principals interviewed imply that schools should be places where people should be happy to be. Teachers should enjoy teaching, students should learning, and parents should enjoy volunteering and participating. The likelihood of these things occurring is very slim if the climate and culture of a school are toxic. By developing good rapport, being highly visible, and being easily accessible with and to all stakeholders, the implication is that the climate of the school will be positive and that an overall culture will be developed in support of student learning and achievement.

Research question 2: Can principal practices and behaviors of high achieving/high climate schools be informative to the field of principal professional learning to enhance positive school climate and culture and student academic performance?

In order to serve as an effective instructional leader and change agent within a school, a solid foundation in a principal's knowledge of leadership responsibilities and behaviors is imperative. In ASCD's 2012 report, *Fulfilling the Promise of the Common Core*, it was noted that until now, principals have been the overlooked constituency as states have sought to gain acceptance of the standards from rank-and-file classroom teachers while simultaneously working

with district-level leaders to create systemic supports and reforms aligned to the standards. However, principals and related administrators hold the power to leverage the Common Core State Standards in schools: they are the linchpins in either delivering or facilitating the delivery of resources and supports to classroom teachers. One of the most pressing needs is to provide powerful resources and professional development to school building leaders. (p. 34)

Qualitative data from the research findings support the need for principals to obtain knowledge of leadership responsibilities and behaviors that can enhance positive school climate and student academic achievement. While every respondent expressed the importance of data, several made remarks about the need for more professional learning courses on how to disaggregate, compare, and utilize the data to drive instruction across the district. Based on research findings, several principal responses were aligned with the most recent research about the importance of principal leadership. According to the NAESP (2013) report *Leadership Matters:* "The behaviors and priorities of effective principals and the measured impact of principal leadership has on student learning" is of utmost importance, yet "principal development remains a low priority."

More specifically, the implications from three principals were that not everyone in the district has the same level of expertise when utilizing data. Hence, the need for quality formal training for teachers and administrators to increase principal skills in the area of data is essential. The comment "It has been a baptism by fire for a long time" exemplifies this need.

Based upon the communication findings and their and relation to professional learning, principals stated they have not had formal training in this area, especially related with communications involving difficult situations. An example of this statement was, "We are not specifically trained on these dealings. We kind of learn them through our own experiences, and over time we become more comfortable in having tough conversations." (W. Allen, personal

interview, August 23, 2017) This was further explained through another principal's account of a conversation with a teacher:

> I was still fairly new to the principalship, so I guess I was still figuring things out myself. When she and I were discussing the progress of her students, the teacher clearly said, "I don't know what it is you are looking for." Those words hit home with me and I realized that I was not supporting this teacher as effectively as she deserved. If I was unclear in my expectations, how on earth could she deliver? Since that day, I have worked diligently to improve my communication skills in all facets as a principal. (A. Keller, personal interview, September 7, 2017)

The connection between the relationships theme and principal professional learning was revealed within the research findings. Respondents stated that relationship skills come naturally for some while others have to work diligently to attain these skills. Similar to communication, the implication is that professional learning based upon building relationships would benefit principals across the district.

While the intellectual quotient (IQ) of school leaders is a significant factor in problem solving and decision-making, there needs to be a greater emphasis on the emotional quotient (EQ) of these leaders based upon these findings. This researcher notes that the terms *emotional intelligence* and *emotional quotient* are interchangeable. According to the website Mindtools.com, emotional intelligence is described as "the ability to understand and manage your own emotions, and those of the people around you" (n.d.). In the mind of this researcher, the EQ of school leaders could be enhanced through a series of workshops based on Daniel Goleman's (2011) five elements of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These workshops would provide further opportunity for school leaders to increase the climate and culture of their school, thus increasing the opportunity

for high student achievement. “Effective principals also need to have a high level of emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills. Often, the power of school leaders is vested in their capacity to persuade and influence, rather than to direct” (Morrison, 2013).

The eight principals interviewed in this study demonstrate a sound understanding of how to effectively utilize data as well as strong EQs, yet the findings demonstrate that these principals had little to no formal training to develop these skills. Additionally, within the findings, across all three research themes, the need for further principal professional learning was acknowledged. Dissemination of these research findings to the superintendent of schools would provide the district with rich qualitative data; utilization of this data can assist in determining short- and long-term goals for professional learning opportunities of principals across the county. By creating professional learning opportunities that would allow other principals to replicate the skills exhibited by those principals in high achieving/high climate schools, the school district would posture itself to see an increase in overall achievement and climate rating throughout all elementary schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

This case study analyzed principal behaviors and their effects on student achievement and school climate as well as possible professional learning opportunities for other principals based upon these findings. This researcher paved the way for additional studies regarding principal characteristics and behaviors and their effects on achievement and climate and culture. Additionally, further studies pertaining to professional learning opportunities can stem from this research.

One recommendation to further this study would be to analyze principals’ behaviors in all four quadrants (low achieving/low climate, low achieving/high climate, high achieving/low climate, and high achieving/high climate) to compare the behaviors of each group. This would

allow the researcher to gain further information and to weed out similar behaviors, thus providing richer detail as to the specific behaviors and characteristics that principals in high achievement and high climate and culture schools possess that differ from their counterparts in the other quadrants.

Another area that future researchers could expand upon following this study would be to magnify the study across multiple school districts. This researcher's study was limited to one specific northern Georgia school district. By including multiple districts, future studies could enhance the findings of the principal behaviors and their effects, as it would include a larger sample size as well as various educational systems. Additionally, this study could be broadened over multiple states to allow the researcher to gather greater information on a national level. Ultimately, this information could create new trends in professional learning for elementary school principals across the nation.

A final recommendation would be to develop this study across all grade levels in public education. This researcher's study focused solely on elementary school principals. However, including principals from the middle school and high school levels would paint a more detailed picture. The findings from this study could better inform district-level staff developers of the types of professional learning needed at all levels instead of primarily at the elementary level.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this study, the researcher was aware of how important a role the principal plays in an elementary school. However, knowing that in the state of Georgia, the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) measures schools' ratings (with an emphasis on student achievement and school climate), this researcher wanted to determine the impact that the principal makes on the areas of student achievement and school climate and

culture. Furthermore, the purpose of this study was to gain a clear understanding of principal behaviors in high achieving/high climate elementary schools in northern Georgia and the impact of these behaviors on future principal professional learning practices. The review of literature revealed the impact that a principal has in these two areas. Eyal and Roth (2011) explained that principals must understand the instructional strengths and weakness of the teachers and must motivate, support, and offer guidance to those teachers in need of improvement. The literature reviewed showed that the principal's role is second only to direct instruction within the classroom as it pertains to student achievement. Furthermore, it was clear that the principal of the school truly establishes the climate and culture for the school. Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) stated, "School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions" (p. 5).

Based on their conversations, each principal displayed similar behaviors and characteristics regarding their approach to increasing student achievement and building a strong climate and culture in her school. Another salient point revealed that these principals had become experts in effectively utilizing data to drive instruction. Despite their emphasis on climate, culture, and data driven instruction, the impetus for their actions was increasing student achievement. Despite their consistent characteristics in maintaining culture and climate, these principals emphasized the need for formal training across the district for administrators and teachers alike in understanding data and using it effectively in regards to increasing student achievement.

Additionally, because these principals are adept in communication and relationship-building techniques, they understand the importance of clear and concise communication techniques. . Moreover, their conversations reveal that they have worked to develop strong

interpersonal skills that afford them comfort and confidence when communicating with teachers, parents, and students. Additionally, they realize the value that being visible and accessible has towards developing open lines of communication and building relationships within their schools. Importantly, these leaders note that developing effective communication skills is not something in which they have received training in either college or on the job. In fact, respondents alluded to the fact that they developed these skills on their own rather than from either classroom instruction in graduate programs or job-embedded professional learning sessions.

In reflecting on what the research shows in terms of the principal's role in student achievement and school climate and culture, it is evident that the principal must understand data and effective communications and have the ability to build relationships (Ebmeier, 2003; Holland, 2004). Principals must be instructional leaders who develop a positive learning climate with high standards and expectations of students and teachers (Hallinger, 2008; Hallinger, 2012; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). By being experts in all aspects of data usage and implementation (disaggregating, analyzing, and employing), principals can increase teachers' understanding of these concepts as well, thus having a huge impact on student achievement. Through developing effective and powerful communications and building strong, meaningful relationships, principals certainly can increase school climate and culture. With the increasing amount of research showing that school climate has an impact on student success (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004), it is imperative that principals be highly in-tune with the climate and culture of their building.

The data provided from the respondents aligned with previous research regarding the impact that the principal has within his building. Nevertheless, while the literature is clear about principals need to use data to improve student achievement as well as the impact of climate on student achievement, the literature does not emphasize the need for professional learning related

to the skills that build communication and teach principals how to be visible, accessible, and develop rapport. As a result, this study points to the need for intentional professional learning of soft skills in leadership in education to enhance principal effectiveness. This study also revealed the passion each principal demonstrated as he/she discussed the development of his/her strong school climates and cultures. This came through their desire to attain a sound ability to understand data, communicate, and build relationships even though formal training was not offered to these principals. In addition, the researcher experienced the principals' deep reflection on their actions, attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics as they related their stories of instructional and environmental leadership within their schools.

In order for a district to enhance greater success in student achievement and school climate and culture, the three themes of data, communication, and relationships need to be a priority for principal professional learning. It is my hope that this research provides insights as to how future professional learning opportunities might be modified in order provide principals with important skills necessary to move toward becoming high achieving/high climate schools.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER FROM KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY

Dear Mr. Kirby:

Your application has been reviewed by IRB members. Your study is eligible for expedited review under the FDA and DHHS (OHRP) designation of category 7 - Individual or group characteristics or behavior.

This is to confirm that your application has been approved. The protocol approved is: Interviews, observations of 8 elementary school principals, and analysis of data provided on the Georgia Department of Education website for the purpose of this study to gain a clear understanding of principal behaviors in high achieving/high climate elementary schools. The consent procedure described is in effect.

NOTE: All surveys, recruitment flyers/emails, and consent forms must include the IRB study number noted above, prominently displayed on the first page of all materials.

You are granted permission to conduct your study as described in your application effective immediately. The IRB calls your attention to the following obligations as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. The study is subject to continuing review on or before 6/28/2018. At least two weeks prior to that time, go to http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/progress-report-form.php to submit a progress report. Progress reports not received in a timely manner will result in expiration and closure of the study.

2. Any proposed changes to the approved study must be reported and approved prior to implementation. This is accomplished through submission of a progress report along with revised consent forms and survey instruments.

3. All records relating to conducted research, including signed consent documents, must be retained for at least three years following completion of the research. You are responsible for ensuring that all records are accessible for inspection by authorized representatives as needed. Should you leave or end your professional relationship with KSU for any reason, you are responsible for providing the IRB with information regarding the housing of research records and who will maintain control over the records during this period.

4. Unanticipated problems or adverse events relating to the research must be reported promptly to the IRB. See http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/reporting-unanticipated-problems.php for definitions and reporting guidance.

5. A final progress report should be provided to the IRB at the closure of the study.

Contact the IRB at irb@kennesaw.edu or at (470) 578-2268 if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Christine Ziegler, Ph.D.
KSU Institutional Review Board Chair and Director

cc: sc roft10@kennesaw.edu

APPENDIX B

GEORGIA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY

Georgia Elementary School Climate Survey

Georgia Elementary School Climate Survey	
Demographic Information	
Gender	○ Female ○ Male
Ethnicity	○ Hispanic or Latino ○ Not Hispanic or Latino
Race	○ White ○ Black or African American ○ Asian ○ American Indian or Alaskan Native ○ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
Grade	○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5
1. I like school.	! Always ! Often ! Sometimes ! Never
2. I feel like I do well in school.	! Always ! Often ! Sometimes ! Never
3. My school wants me to do well.	! Always ! Often ! Sometimes ! Never
4. My school has clear rules for behavior.	! Always ! Often ! Sometimes ! Never
5. I feel safe at school.	! Always ! Often ! Sometimes ! Never

6. Teachers treat me with respect. ! Always ! Often ! Sometimes ! Never
7. Good behavior is noticed at my school. ! Always ! Often ! Sometimes ! Never
8. Students in my class behave so that teachers can teach. ! Always ! Often ! Sometimes ! Never
9. I get along with other students. ! Always ! Often ! Sometimes ! Never
10. Students treat each other well. ! Always ! Often ! Sometimes ! Never
11. There is an adult at my school who will help me if I need it. ! Always ! Often ! Sometimes ! Never

APPENDIX C

GEORGIA SCHOOL PERSONNEL CLIMATE SURVEY

Georgia Personnel Climate Survey

Demographic Questions	
Primary Job Classification	○ Teacher ○ Administrator ○ Certified Staff Member ○ Classified/Other Staff Member
Primary Grade Taught	○
Area(s) Taught	○ Science ○ ELA ○ Social Studies ○ Connections (e.g., art, PE, band, music) ○ Math ○ Special education ○ Other, please specify:
School Work Experience	○ 0-5 years ○ 6-10 years ○ 11-15 years ○ More than 15 years
Highest Degree	○ Bachelor's Degree ○ Master's Degree ○ Educational Specialist Degree ○ Doctoral Degree ○ Other, please specify:
Gender	○ Female ○ Male
Ethnicity	What is your ethnicity? ○ Hispanic or Latino ○ Not Hispanic or Latino
Race/Ethnicity	What is your race? Mark one or more races to indicate your race. ○ White ○ Black or African American ○ Asian ○ American Indian or Alaskan Native ○ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

GSHS Teacher Survey
Staff Connectedness
1. I feel supported by other teachers at my school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
2. I get along well with other staff members at my school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
3. I feel like I am an important part of my school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
4. I enjoy working in teams (e.g. grade level, content) at my school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
5. I feel like I fit in among other staff members at my school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
6. I feel connected to the teachers at my school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
Structure for Learning
7. Teachers at my school frequently recognize students for good behavior. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree

8. Teachers at my school have high standards for achievement. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
9. My school promotes academic success for all students. ▭ Strongly Disagree ▭ Somewhat Disagree
10. All students are treated fairly by the adults at my school. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree
11. Teachers at my school treat students fairly regardless of race, ethnicity, or culture. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree
12. Teachers at my school work hard to make sure that students do well. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree
School Safety
13. I feel safe at my school. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree
14. I have been concerned about my physical safety at school. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree
15. If I report unsafe or dangerous behaviors, I can be sure the problem will be taken care of. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree

16. I feel safe when entering and leaving my school building.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

17. Some students carry weapons (e.g., guns or knives) at my school.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Physical Environment

18. My school building is well maintained.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

19. Instructional materials are up to date and in good condition.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

20. Teachers at my school keep their classrooms clean and organized.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

21. Teachers make an effort to keep the school building and facilities clean.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Peer and Adult Relations

22. Students at my school would help another student who was being bullied.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

23. Students at my school get along well with one another. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree
24. Students at my school get along well with the teachers and other adults. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree
25. Students at my school treat each other with respect. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree
26. Students at my school treat other students fairly regardless of race, ethnicity, or culture. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree
27. Students at my school show respect to other students regardless of their academic ability. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree
28. Students at my school demonstrate behaviors that allow teachers to teach, and students to learn. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree
Parent Involvement
29. Parents at my school attend PTA meetings or parent/teacher conferences. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree

30. At this school, parents frequently volunteer to help on special projects. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree
31. Parents at this school frequently attend school activities. □ Strongly Disagree □ Somewhat Disagree □ Somewhat Agree □ Strongly Agree

APPENDIX D

GEORGIA PARENT SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY

Georgia Parent School Climate Survey

Demographic Questions	
Please indicate the grade of your student or students (mark all that apply)	○ k ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 6th ○ 7th ○ 8th ○ 9th ○ 10th ○ 11th ○ 12th
Is your student enrolled in any of these programs? (mark all that apply)	○ Special Education Program or has an Individual Education Program (IEP) ○ Gifted program or Honors/Advanced Placement courses ○ Not applicable, not sure, or decline to answer
Gender	○ Female ○ Male
Ethnicity	What is your ethnicity? ○ Hispanic or Latino ○ Not Hispanic or Latino
Race/Ethnicity	What is your race? Mark one or more races to indicate your race. ○ White ○ Black or African American ○ Asian ○ American Indian or Alaskan Native ○ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
Georgia Parent School Climate Survey	
Teaching and Learning	

1. Teachers at my student's school have high standards for achievement. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
2. Teachers at my student's school frequently recognize students for good behavior. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
3. Teachers at my student's school work hard to make sure that students do well. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
4. Teachers at my student's school promote academic success for all students. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
School Safety
5. My student's school sets clear rules for behavior. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
6. My student feels safe at school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
7. My student feels safe going to and from school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
8. School rules are consistently enforced at my student's school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree

9. School rules and procedures at my student's school are fair. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
Interpersonal Relationships
10. My student likes school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
11. My student feels successful at school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
12. My student is frequently recognized for good behavior. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
13. I feel comfortable talking to teachers at my student's school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
14. Staff at my student's school communicates well with parents. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
15. I feel welcome at my student's school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
16. All students are treated fairly at my student's school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree

17. Teachers at my student's school treat all students with respect. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
Institutional Environment
18. My student's school building is well maintained. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
19. My student's textbooks are up to date and in good condition. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
20. Teachers at my student's school keep their classrooms clean and organized. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
Parent Involvement
21. I am involved in the decision making process at my student's school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
22. I am actively involved in activities at my student's school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
23. I attend parent/teacher conferences at my student's school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree
24. I frequently volunteer to help on special projects at my student's school. ! Strongly Disagree ! Somewhat Disagree ! Somewhat Agree ! Strongly Agree

APPENDIX E

E-MAIL REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

Dear Colleague,

As you are probably aware, I am in the dissertation stage of my Doctoral Degree at Kennesaw State University. My study is on Principal Behaviors and Characteristics of High Climate/Culture and High Student Achievement schools at the Elementary Level. The purpose of this study is to determine if there are discernible behaviors and characteristics that can inform future professional learning for principals at the elementary level. I am in hopes that you will be willing to participate in this study. All information in the study will be completely confidential as no names or identifiers will be listed at any point in the study. I would need about 20-30 minutes of your time to interview you. The interview will be audio recorded for accuracy for transcription purposes only. The interviews will be deleted once transcription has occurred. The transcriptions will be safeguarded by me personally and will be destroyed after a seven year period.

If you would be willing to help me complete my research by participating in the interview, I would be more than grateful. Please respond stating if you are willing to or would prefer not to participate. If you are willing to give me a half hour of your time, I will follow up with you personally to schedule next steps. Thank you in advance for your willingness to help me in tackling this final phase of my Doctorate Degree.

Sincerely,

Christian

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction Questions (to be sent in advance of the interview)

- Please share with us the following:

  (a) Your educational background (degrees, certification, teaching)
  (b) Your administrative experience
  (c) Your interest in this position

- Please take a few minutes to tell us about your education, teaching and administrative experiences, and yourself. Feel free to add any other details and experiences outside the educational field that you feel will help us know you better.

- Please describe your experiences and personal strengths that qualify you for this position. What particular skills, knowledge and abilities would you bring to our district and [middle] school programs?

Instruction and Student Achievement

- What elements should be included in a total [elementary] instructional program?

- In trying to reduce our achievement gap, what would some of the first steps you would want to take?

- What steps would you follow if a student was struggling in your school/class?

School Climate

- As principal, what might we see you doing to build a relationship of trust with teachers, parents, and the district administrative team? ***OR*** As a teacher, what might we see you doing to build a relationship of trust with students, parents, and colleagues?

- What factors most affect positive school climate in a [grade level] school?

- What are effective strategies of ensuring each student and parent is fully engaged in this school?

APPENDIX G

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Release of "Educational Records" for Research Purposes
Confidentiality Statement

I, _____being a Certified Educator within the employee of the Cherokee County School District having applied for and received permission to review student educational records in connection with a research project for a degree program in which I am currently enrolled understand and agree as follows:

1) **The information I will receive is an "Educational Record" as defined by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA") 20 U.S.C. 1232g**

2) **I will maintain the information in a confidential manner and will not release any student identifiable information to any person or persons.**

3) **I will return all student identifiable information I received at the conclusion of my project.**

4) **I will not release or publish any student identifiable information within my project, to my professor(s), my peers or any other persons.**

5) **I will maintain the "Educational Records" in a secure location and take reasonable steps to assure that same is not released inadvertently while in my possession.**

6) **I understand that if I violate any provision hereof, even inadvertently, I will subject myself to discipline which could include the termination of my employment.**

_____
Signature

_____
Notary Public
My commission Expires:_____